ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Mercury EQMM Publication

Winner of the $3000 first prize — in this issue

Cents *Number 40

e President of the United States, Detective — H. F. HEARD
($3000 Prize Winner in EQMM's Short-Story Contest)

s Honor — BEN AMES WILLIAMS
Arabian Night in Park Lane — J. B. PRIESTLEY
e Riddle of the Double Negative — STUART PALMER
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e Case of the Stuttering Sextant — BAYNARD KENDRICK
e Wrong Jar — ANTHONY BERKELEY
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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* — EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Vol. 9, No. 40, MARCH 1947. *Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 25¢ a copy. Annual subscription $3.00 in U. S. and possessions and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $3.50 in Canada; $4.00 in foreign countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.* Copyright, 1947, by The American Mercury, Inc. *Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879.*

Published also in a Talking-Record Edition by The American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky. Manufactured in the United States of America.

Cover and Typography by George Salter

MILDRED FALK, *Managing Editor* — JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *Business Manager*
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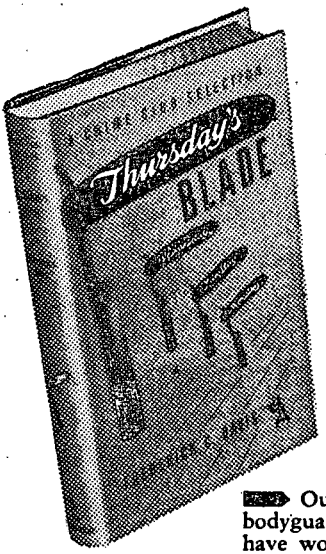

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by Frederick C. Davis

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THE CRIME CLUB

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First, some statistics: In EQMM's First Annual Short-Story Contest we received 838 manuscripts. They sprang from every State in the Union except one — North Dakota; they came also, by sea and by air, from England, Australia, and New Zealand; from France, Germany, Italy, and Austria; from Alaska, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. In EQMM's Second Annual Contest we received 623 manuscripts; this time four States in the Union were absent on roll-call — Mississippi, Montana, Vermont, and Wyoming; again manuscripts originated from England and Australia, but to atone for a lapse on the part of New Zealand (represented the first year by a prize-winning story from Ngaio Marsh), writers in Canada, Ireland, and Union of South Africa mailed in submissions. So the British Empire continued to bear its full share of the detective-story writer's burden. Again France and Germany came through, but while we lost out on Italy and Austria, we received an entry from the Netherlands, and for the first time we nibbled at French Colonial Possessions — a story was submitted by a resident of Algeria. Again Alaska and Mexico answered our 'tec tocsin, but Argentina and Brazil failed to produce entries.

What deductions can be drawn from these statistics? Geographically, we lost ground in the United States; beyond our own shores, we at least broke even — gaining a new outpost of contribution for every distant one lost. But while these geographic highlights are informative, they are just that and no more: it is still too soon after World War II to expect maximum response from the rest of the world — greater problems of post-war adjustment must first be solved before our one-world can go back to writing detective stories with a free heart. Life and liberty, as we all should have learned once again, come before the pursuit of happiness.

What conclusions can be reached quantitatively? Well, we certainly ran behind in the actual number of submissions — approximately 25 per cent behind. The figures are indisputable: 838 manuscripts piled up by the closing date of our first contest; only 623 manuscripts reached our desk in the second contest. Does this mean that the second contest excited less interest, and therefore less participation, than the first one? It would seem so — yet such an inference is completely false. Only one thing is significant in any form of literature — quality, not quantity.

What, then, are the qualitative results of EQMM's second contest, in comparison with the first? Before giving you the list of winners, which eloquently speaks for itself, let us call your attention to two developments of extraordinary importance. First, concerning the average *level of quality: In the first contest there were many submissions which, by the time we read page 5 or 6 of the manuscript, we were critically certain could be ruled out.*

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In the second contest there was hardly a manuscript that did not have to be read clear through to the final paragraph. This means that the average level of quality was considerably higher in the second contest — what we lost in quantity was more than offset by consistency of technical and artistic excellence. Second: In the first contest we could not find a single submission by a beginner that we judged worthy of a prize — and believe us, we pulled for 'tec tyros with all our emotional might. In the second contest no less than three — count them, three! — first stories *made the prize grade. We were so pleased with this "consummation devoutly to be wish'd" that we inaugurated a new group of awards called: Special Prizes for First-Published Stories. This development is undoubtedly the most important accomplishment in this year's contest: it should give courage and encouragement to every would-be writer who has the ambition, the patience, and the indomitable urge to write detective stories. It proves (just in case proof was ever necessary) that every entrant, even the veriest beginner, has an equal chance to win; it proves that we want new blood.*

In EQMM's first contest we originally offered one First Prize and six Second Prizes; we wound up awarding one First Prize, six Second Prizes, four Third Prizes, and four Fourth Prizes — fifteen prizes instead of the seven promised. In EQMM's second contest we again advertised one First Prize and six Second Prizes; and again we shot the works — awarding eighteen prizes this year instead of the seven guaranteed. Here are the eighteen prize-winning stories — a glorious roster!

FIRST PRIZE

The President of the United States, Detective by H. F. Heard

SPECIAL AWARD OF MERIT

The House in Goblin Wood by Carter Dickson

SECOND PRIZES

The Mystery of the 81st Kilometer Stone by T. S. Stribling
The House-in-Your-Hand Murder by Roy Vickers
Rope's End by Viola Brothers Shore
Love Comes to Miss Lucy by Q. Patrick
The Wood-for-the-Trees by Philip MacDonald
Tragedy of a Handkerchief by Michael Innes
The Quarterdeck Club by Leslie Charteris
Challenge to the Reader by Hugh Pentecost

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THIRD PRIZES

The Other Side of the Curtain	by Helen McCloy
Deadlock	by Edmund Crispin
The Flying Corpse	by A. E. Martin
People Do Fall Downstairs	by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding
Fingerprints Don't Lie	by Stuart Palmer

SPECIAL PRIZES FOR FIRST-PUBLISHED STORIES

The Nine Mile Walk	by Harry Kemelman
Listen, Listen!	by R. E. Kendall
The Widow's Walk	by Jack Finney

The eighteen prize-winning stories will appear in EQMM beginning with this issue, March 1947, and ending with the issue of November 1947. They will not appear in the order listed above: the exact sequence will harmonize with our editorial policy of making every issue of EQMM as varied and diversified as possible. Naturally, the winner of the First Prize will be published first — in this issue; and we can tell you now, with malice aforethought, that Carter Dickson's story, which won the Special Award of Merit, will be deliberately held back until the very end, the the November 1947 issue — this to make you wait with mounting anticipation for the first short story ever written about Carter Dickson's world-famous detective, the incomparable H.M. (Henry Merrivale). We point out also the exciting fact that the prize-winning stories include tales about such celebrated sleuths as Professor Henry Poggioli, Inspector Appleby, The Saint, and the first short story ever written by Philip MacDonald about his noted criminologist, Colonel Anthony Gethryn.

Directly after the publication of our November 1947 issue, all eighteen prize-winning stories will be published in book form — the second in our series of annual prize-winning anthologies — to be called THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1947.

And as we said last year, that isn't all: We hereby announce the renewal of EQMM's annual short-story contest. Starting immediately, the prize contest is on again for this year, with Christopher Morley, Howard Haycraft, and your Editor once more the Board of Judges. In our first contest we awarded more than $8000.00 in prizes; in the second contest we increased the awards to more than $11,000.00; in the third contest, now officially on, we guarantee again a First Prize of $3000.00 and six Second Prizes of $500.00 each, but if results warrant — and we are sure they will! — we shall add Third Prizes and Special Awards, as we did in the

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first and second contests. The closing date of the third contest will be October 20, 1947, with winners to be announced by Christmas 1947.

We plan to keep EQMM's annual short-story contest running indefinitely — so that year after year we can bring you the finest original detective-crime short stories being written, by the most talented writers, young and old, new and well-known — so that year after year, with ever-increasingly quality, "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" will continue to be the proving ground for the best in contemporary detective-crime short fiction.

One point more: It is your Editor's custom to introduce each story in EQMM with a ratiocinative rubric, usually irrelevant to the story in particular but relevant to detective stories in general. Last year every prize-winning story was prefaced by a long editorial song-and-dance full of personal opinions on detective-story form and technique, unfamiliar tidbits of detective-story history, lore, and theory, anecdotes and reminiscences — and just plain 'tec trivia. This year we have decided to change our editorial approach. Instead of writing a long foreword to each prize-winning story, we shall write a short foreword restricted exclusively to biographical and bibliographical data on the author, and then follow most stories with longer afterwords devoted to the stories themselves. The reason for this change in editorial policy is simple once explained: when the analytical and historical comment precedes the story, it must be guarded and general — to keep your Editor from committing the cardinal sin of revealing too much of the story's plot; but when the editorial comment comes after the story, your Editor can discuss all details of plot openly and specifically. So we now caution you: Do not read the editorial tailpiece to any prize-winning story until after you have read the story itself. *This new approach (rather, this rear guard action) will permit your Editor to delve more deeply than before into those curious or remarkable aspects of plot and technique which, you will discover, individualize all the prize-winning stories in EQMM's Second Annual Contest.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *As a writer, Mr. Heard has a split, or dual, personality. Anglo-Irish, born in 1889, his serious work (signed as by Gerald Heard) deals with history, politics, and religion. His first book, published in 1925, traced the historical connections between architecture and costume. For five years he was popular science commentator for the British Broadcasting Corporation. At the present time (he now lives in California) he is a devotee of Vedanta, a highly mystical and ethical religious philosophy deriving from late 19th-century Hinduism. Gerald Heard is the spiritual godfather of this Western movement which includes such enthusiasts as Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and J. B. Priestley. It has been conceded,*

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even by enemies of his beliefs, that Mr. Heard's controversial books are brilliantly and provocatively written. Mr. Heard's other literary self (under the name of H. F. Heard) is the creator of two detective tours de force — A TASTE FOR HONEY *(1941) and* REPLY PAID *(1942), both concerning a detective called Mr. Mycroft who is first met in beekeeping retirement. Although a certain name is never mentioned in either book, the identity of Mr. Mycroft was never a mystery to the true connoisseur. Both books were vehemently acclaimed by such eminent Irregulars as Christopher Morley and Vincent Starrett. Readers of EQMM will remember H. F. Heard's first Mr. Mycroft short story, the remarkable tale called "The Adventure of Mr. Montalba, Obsequist," in our issue of September 1943. The second Mr. Mycroft short story is titled "The Enchanted Garden" and it will appear in EQMM in the near future . . .*

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DETECTIVE

by H. F. HEARD

"I'M PUZZLED by some of my readings," Skelton volunteered.

No one in the club room was sufficiently interested to raise his eyes from the illustrated paper he was leafing over. Skelton was the tidal expert. The other specialists of this team at the newest marine laboratory agreed about few things, but Skelton's job was one of them and Skelton was another. "After all," they used to remark, "he's only a sort of lab. boy to us. The meteorologist has really more of value to give. Skelton's nothing but a time keeper."

But Skelton was evidently puzzled enough not to take a snub. He cleared his throat with a certain defiance. "I've mentioned the possibility earlier to one or two of you. But now there's no doubt and what's more, no possible reason for it."

Still no one reacted.

"It'll really matter to all of you if it's true." A note of urgency made his voice strain. The tone more than the words irritated Bolder, one of the chemists. To stop the sound which he found made his reading difficult he looked over the edge of *Life* and asked:

"What are they showing?"

"Well, it's slight of course but it's unmistakable — and there's no doubt it's growing. The high tides for each corresponding month have each been gaining on the last. There's no doubt an increase in the maxima and what's incomprehensible — there's no reason."

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That made Exon intervene. He was the large marine biologist. Someone said that he had taken to his subject because of all creation molluscs were the hardest of animals to pick quarrels with.

"You'll be saying next the moon's out of step or the sun's got a 'swelled head.'"

"Laws of Nature don't change," this was from Simson. He was the Geneticist, one that had never quite recovered from the violent controversies with which the birth of his subject had been attended. He was an old man now and only a boy then. But his father — biology ran in the family — had been involved in the bitterness between the elder Darwinians and the Mendelians, as they were then called. Simson reacted into the strictest orthodoxy. He used to repeat his maxim like a mantram whenever anyone introduced findings which might be radical.

"Your instruments are wrong, young man — that's what it is."

Of course such a remark is a reflection. But it was clear that Simson had the room with him. Skelton could not command a single ear. He was upset, quite upset. Of course it was clear that if that was the reception given by such men as his colleagues, he could hope for nothing better from anyone outside — at least, in the professional world. And how could we expect the lay world to pay attention if the experts disregarded?

He left the club room, but before going to his apartment went back to his division of the laboratories. He checked over his tables again with worried care. He plotted his graph over again. The result stood. Of course it was slight but science had no right to ignore facts because they first emerged as small divergencies. It might well be — no, not the instruments or faulty observation — but some more or less local peculiarity, some current shift, surface wind pressure even, or perhaps a change of levels in the oceanic floor. His instruments were the best in the world — this new set-up had been equipped with a plant better than any other marine Lab. in history. And though the rest might look down on his job as mere routine, yet he knew he had been picked as a first-class observer. No one else in the tidal world had as yet reported any evidence of possible shift of maxima. But then why should they? These instruments were incomparable. Besides, the change, whatever it was, might have become evident here on this shore line, first. Well, he would be right in one thing — it would be peculiarly awkward for all those colleagues of his.

That was midsummer day 1977. The world had been going on its increasingly odd way for a third of a century — since in '45, W.W.2.A. (World War Second Armistice) had begun. Tension for thirty years makes crisis turn into a kind of stasis. "Bomb! Bomb!" had gone the degenerative way of "Wolf! Wolf!" People had to go on living. Beside there had been changes — large political

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changes. All the old lot were gone. Of course the world was still stuck in that balance of power which was commonly called The Two Powers and The Hyphen. There was the U.S., the U.K., and the USSR. When someone asked once in Congress why The Hyphen was still called the United Kingdom, a wisecracker shot in that U.K. was really a contraction for "the Un-O.K." There was no doubt of it — the world had shrunk to two big balances with a diminishing rider-on-the-beam.

But there was bigger and less foreseen change than that. That which had been called the Russian Revolution had itself swayed uneasily on the beam. Should it go West or East? Finally the Russian tendency won, the deep racial tendency to go Tartar, to go East. The great Moscow ascendency passed very quickly after Stalin's death. The Greek Orthodox Church canonized him as St. Joseph of Moscow, and Moscow followed the fate of all Holy Cities. Actual administration had increasingly moved East. Just as had happened to the earlier world empire — when Rome had to make a New Rome and then abdicate to it — so now the administrative center had shifted away, back to the site of Ghenghis's world capital, Karakorum. Once the assimilation of China took place then the center of population, industry, and business lay there. China, as usual, had swallowed those who rashly tried to get her into their clutches. Finally that astute Commissar, Yang Chin, ruled that Moscow had become a place of too sacred memories to be defiled by business and the Russians were too mystically-gifted a race to be involved in politics. Just as England used to get rid of individual politicians who were in the way by "kicking them upstairs" — making them peers — so, as became the new order that thought no longer in individuals but in classes, the New Commissar of Commissars, as he chose to be entitled, elevated the whole of the Russians to Ritual Rank — the highest rank, that performed all the ceremonies. The rank below, naturally, did all the hard work — the actual running of the machine.

It seemed that these internal shifts were going to keep the huge landmass empire outwardly quiet. Most people wanted good auguries, so they claimed this change was one. "A Chinese," they told each other, "never likes war. We'll have peace for a long while now, you mark my words." And their words appeared to have been accurate.

But Washington — or rather the tip of it — was not really easy. On that tip now sat President Place. He had many points that recommended him. Firstly, his name. It had given him the first three terms largely through the great success of the three slogans — "Place the Irreplaceable," "Place him again," and that fine starter, "Make Place for the People, Give Place to the People." Secondly, there was his size. He was a mammoth of a man. His

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hands were bigger even than George Washington's, he was taller than Lincoln, he weighed more than Taft. "The biggest President ever." That told too. Thirdly, behind the bulk and the bellow, the rampart and the roar — for he could shout down anyone — behind that vast build-up of eloquence and adiposity, that seemed so obvious that nothing more could be in that balloon of bluffness, there was a curiously observant mind. He certainly was not as simple as he looked — that was his first line of defense. His sudden assaults of frank man-to-man openness, which proved often so disconcerting to the clever, were uncommonly well-timed. After a while it was noted that he never let anyone else put over that kind of thing on him. It was he always who brought down that great sirloin of a hand and wrist on the shoulder of the other disputant, patted him almost to his knees, and bellowing that they really agreed, pushed him out of the room.

His fourth strong point — as one scaled this Gulliver Giant — lay in his throat. He had vocal chords to equal all his other out-size dimensions, and he certainly knew how to handle them. In his first campaign his voice had been called "The Diapason of Democracy." The title stuck. And he certainly could do such things with the diaphragms of every democrat throughout the world that he soon had earned himself another title, "The Spokesman of the Western Hemisphere." When you reached his head — if you got so far — you found the clue to these apparent contraries. It's hard to look a man square in the eyes who naturally looks clean over the top of your head and when he does look at you must look down. But if you did you were repaid. The head was huge — no tailing off at the top. The eyes were deep-set, so you scarcely guessed how little they missed. But suddenly they would open and then they were more imperative than the voice. It used to be remarked, "If he roars, you obey. If he glares, you go."

But the real power lay back in that huge head. Everything interested him. That was why he had become the Head. Specialists found they could come to him and somehow he'd understand — far better than their colleagues. He wasn't a specialist but better than any of them he could always see what they were driving at. And so he could link them up. Further, he'd see where their high-magnification finds would be tending. Yes, the people had once again shown their profound horse-sense. They had chosen a mountain of a mount whose head saw far further than either the specialist or the man in the street would ever see. And crowning all these inner advantages was the fact that in spite of his high scoring no one could believe that it wasn't after all just luck. People couldn't help feeling that a man as large as that couldn't be as shrewd as he was big.

Yes, he certainly didn't look like a vigilant man. That no doubt was

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the reason why he had so seldom been caught napping. Naturally, then, his adversaries, right round the globe, were seldom out of his mind.

Some three months after Skelton's failure to interest his marine colleagues, Place the Irreplaceable was waiting in his White House room for the Chief of Staff. He had been away on a courtesy mission which covered inevitably a secret inquiry. The mission was to carry congratulations to the Commissar of Commissars on his unanimous election to preside for another Five Years of Plan. The inquiry was to find if there could be any truth in one of those maddeningly ambiguous reports that secret service agents of the highest standing delight in sending to their superiors. Such reports are like the pronouncements of the Delphic oracle: they may be just to fill the time and show you are worth your fee; or they may be ways of tying up a message so that only your own chiefs can see the point. If Place and Chief of Staff Chase were right, this message was the latter. But if so, it was unusually urgent, and confirmation must be had as quickly as possible. The only way — and it seemed providential — was for the Chief of Staff, since he must go with the Congratulations, to go himself as a secret service agent.

The C. of S. was late. It was no use trying to learn what a plane was doing once it was over the territories of the USSR — an empire that now stretched from Bangkok to the Rhine Basin. While Place waited, his secretary came in and reported:

"There's no news of the plane yet. You have a few minutes?"

"What do you want me to do?" He questioned as he slowly spun his huge bulk in its special revolving-chair.

"Well, he's a relation of my sister's — a tidal expert — and he's worried me. I've looked him up and he evidently is a good man at his job. Seems to me that it's just because he may have found out something a little too startling that maybe his colleagues won't listen to him. And he's quite certain now that nobody but you would, and that you'd understand if he could see you for only five minutes, and that now you and you alone should know."

Irreplaceable Place who had replaced quite enough experts and specialists by others who proved to be just as good, had a particular respect for the breed who gets alarmed at apparent trifles. For the moment too he had nothing to do. He had to wait and he hated waiting. Also, his secretary wanted it. Pity women can always be worried by men who worry. Besides, in his queer flair-fancying mind this request and the queer report of the secret service agent seemed somehow to be linked.

"You say he's a tidal expert?"

"Yes, he's from that biggest and newest set-up on the Atlantic Coast."

"All right, but only five minutes to the tick. If he can't interest me by then, out he goes."

As Skelton entered, he was met with, "You've got exactly three hun-

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dred seconds. Can you make it?"

"I've got it all in three charts." Skelton had been a teacher before he took up pure research. He knew how to catch attention, if given a chance. On the table in front of the President he dealt his papers like a card-dealer, saying as he spread the sequence, "The Tables of coordinate tidal records." "The sequences of maxima." "The graph curve plotted to show the angle of acceleration."

Place was used to complicated documents. He grunted at Number One, said "Um" to Number Two. At Number Three he began to tap his lower teeth with his thumbnail — an infallible sign that he was interested.

"Why haven't we all heard of this before?"

Skelton was ready for that. "I was puzzled too. The effect is showing most down at our place where we have better instruments. But before trying to see you I visited a number of other marine Labs. The effect can be traced in their tables — not so clearly, but it's already appearing. But, as there's no explanation, no one wants to take notice of it till they know the cause."

Place threw himself back in his chair. "I could, of course, hand you over to another expert who'd completely discredit you. But I won't. What you show here may fit in with something else. I wonder . . . there — the three hundredth second's gone. Off you go — no, not out that way — into that small room over there. Shut the door and wait. I think I'll be wanting you after all."

As the door closed behind Skelton, Place heard the handle of the room's principal door turn. Quickly, for a man of his size, he turned the charts over on their faces and turned his own to the main door. His secretary entered.

"He's in," she said. "And he'll be over in a few minutes. What have you done with Dr. Skelton?"

"I've told him to wait. Now give me all the papers I'll need for General Chase."

They went through them together and he spread them on top of the charts.

Five minutes later the secretary ushered in a tall man with the appearance of a rather kindly attorney. He took the chair beside Place's desk.

"Was there anything in it?"

"I've already had the microphotos developed and enlarged."

"You got some shots? But do they show anything?"

For answer the Chief of Staff took an envelope from his wallet-pocket and picked from it some strips of serial photos. The President took them from him.

"Yes, you've certainly got something there. That's pretty big building. But surely it wasn't building that you were snooping for. The USSR's always building. Mongolian I call it — Big Wall and all that nonsense."

"We used to be fond of a bit of building ourselves once." Chase smiled.

"Adolescent ambition: now we

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want not big dumps but big men. How did you get them and why did you choose just these?"

"The first answer will tell you the second. Everything went according to plan. There was the prepared breakdown of the stratoplane. Even the pilot didn't know we'd arranged that. There was the planned providentialism that a little old low-down three-hundred-and-fifty-an-hour plane was waiting for repairs at Cologne. I cabled I could just make it if I flew in that little old plane directly to Karakorum where His Mongolian Majesty was about to be inaugurated. Of course I was met at the Rhine by the high-up spy whom Yang had specially sent me for my outward honor and my inner inspection. He came, as his rank required, with two attendants. So he had me and my two aides under constant surveillance. We went straight ahead and nothing was done to distract our attention from the outlook — scenery's very pleasant from seven thousand feet — we hardly ever see it now. But when we were approaching the Urals I noticed my host was getting ready for something. He and his attendants unpacked not only some light refreshments but also were laying out some kind of show for us. He then came over to my seat and asked if I and my aides would not like to look at the actual models of the big inaugural pageant which he had brought with him to beguile the tedium of the ride. He told us that no one had seen them outside his office save, of course, the Supreme Commissar. He got out a folding table from his baggage, gathered us round, and he and his two assistants set up the models — pretty little things, they certainly have a gift for that sort of thing — and made this miniature marionette show go through all its dance steps. He explained that lighting would play a great part and fussed about to get it just right, finally saying that the daylight spoiled the effect. So he pulled down the shades on the plane windows and rigged up a miniature flood-lighting. Oh, he took a lot of trouble to please us, so much that the moment he called us into that little huddle I knew he wanted us away from the windows. So, as I had welcomed his offer to display his ingenious little preview, I hung up the fountain pen with which I had been writing till that moment on the little sling that is by each window in that pattern plane for one's book, paper, or what-have-you. Of course, these photos come from that pen. It's a neat little gadget and it was quite easy to hang it so that it was able to go on taking microfilm every five minutes all the time that our obliging escort was keeping us away from the windows. The pen hung very neatly so it could squint at the landscape through the fine line between the shade and the window-jamb."

"Excellent, Chase. But granted these are things they didn't want us to see, do you know what they mean?"

"No. But I agree with you that they may possibly link up with the

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S.S. report. First of all, look at these."

Chase bent down and took some maps from his portfolio.

"This is the district of Russia we were then flying over. These green crosses show where each photo was taken. Notice this fairly straight red line — it wavers but goes across country fairly well — linking up the green crosses. Notice also that a couple of big rivers flow down and cut across the red line. The red line is the hundred-foot contour-line. Where those two big rivers cross the red contour-line are two of the largest building projects shown in nearly all the photos."

Place scratched his head: "And at first I thought they were some big power development! Now I get it!"

"Mr. President, here's the only link I see. The secret report merely said — because as Spy L55, B2 holds a chair at Karakorum he naturally can't report in person or send obvious messages — coast-line, contour, changes, and those clues had to be spread through many messages so that it took us some time to be sure."

"Yes, yes, I know all that," the President said impatiently. There was silence for about a minute, broken only by the sound of the President's thumb-nail tapping his teeth. Then his mouth opened wide and from it came quietly, but with the greatest conviction, the single word, "Gosh!"

President Place heaved himself up and ambled over to the small door.

"Yes," he said. "It's worthy of Yang. A very neat use of giant power. There's no doubt he's nearly ready for his grand slam."

He threw open the small door and beckoned.

"Dr. Skelton, I want you to meet General Chase."

While the two were shaking hands the President unearthed the charts, arranged them neatly with the map sections, and under them he put the photo strips.

"Now, gentlemen, I have my exhibit ready. Dr. Skelton, I'm sure these will click in your mind. When you have grasped their full significance, as I now understand it, please explain to the General."

Skelton was almost as quick as the President, for here was the cause of his puzzling phenomenon. After all three had been bent over the papers for some minutes, the scientist and the soldier straightened up and looked at the politician. The huge executive was back in his chair.

"I see now," said Chase, his features taut. "But what are you going to do about it?"

"There's only one thing to do. At least, until I've done that I can't do anything else, and it might work. I believe, you know, in frontal attacks of frankness."

"What do you mean?" both men asked.

"Send for the Secretary of State, Chase. No, get him on the phone for me. Dr. Skelton, you stay here. Frankness begins at home. I'm going to call this — this bluff — if it is. But we can at least find out and then —

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well, we'll see."

As soon as the Secretary of State was on the line, the President told him to come over, but added, "Before you do, leave instructions that a television long-distance conference set-up be sent along here, at once. At once. It must get here as soon as you do."

The urgency in his voice told. The Secretary of State and the radio specialists who geared the plant for T.l-d.C's turned up almost together. The Secretary of State sent through his diplomatic code beam-message requesting a conference immediately with the Commissar of Foreign Affairs. In five minutes they were talking.

"Would it be possible for the Supreme Commissar to speak with the President of the United States?"

Another five minutes brought the answer — Yes.

The screens were set, the President with the Secretary of State standing behind him were grouped in their little apse of beams. It was rather like the staging of an old family photograph a century earlier. The two men faced a little semi circular alcove of grey-gleaming, glasslike metal exactly similar to that in which they themselves stood. This curved dull mirror as they watched it — it looked like a half-section of a giant tube — began to glow and gradually became as bright as the niche in which they stood. Through its vibrating glow figures began to glimmer and waver; then they became steady, colored, stereoscopic. They were as though alive and moving in the room and their voices as clear. Yes, it was Yang in his plain blue silk robe and beside him his Commissar of Foreign Affairs. Place bowed. The Secretary of State made the formal introduction. Yang bowed and in perfect English, though with something of that archaic accent once called Oxford, remarked on the pleasure it gave him to see that the President was in such good health.

Place countered by hoping that the Commissar of Commissars was in equal health and that the strain of the continued duties to which he had again been called would not tax his energy. Yang smiled and bowed again. Then, without a moment's warning, Place showed his hand.

"I am appealing to you as the world's most powerful man" . . . Yang did not smile; he inclined his head a little. He showed he would listen. "I am not going to say anything about what I don't know," continued the President, "I'm not interested in theories and surely I don't want suspicions" . . . Again Yang bowed but as he bent his head he kept his eyes on the face of the fat man who from the other side of the earth was trying to get at him. "But there are some big world facts, facts of climate, that concern us all — desperately, if they go wrong. I'm asking for cooperation in fact-finding. We're all on this globe together. . . ."

Yang's eyelids drooped for a minute. He looked then like those photos which showed him seated receiving

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the congratulations of the endless Committees of Soviets on St. Joseph's Day. Place realized that he must cut to the center at once.

"We fear — that is, our tidal experts fear — that something on a vast scale may have shifted, gone wrong, and the center of the disturbance may be in your districts."

The President stopped. Yang raised his head. "Did you want to ask anything further?"

"Yes, we want to ask that we get together on this thing and help each other. As I've said, we're on one planet which is more than three-fifths covered by sea. It's our common concern if we are going to lose much more land to the sea — it's our common concern because we are all land-dwelling animals."

Place smiled. Yang's mongolian features palely reflected a shadow of humor or perhaps of courtesy. Then he was grave, obviously grave. He paused and remarked slowly.

"It is kind of you to come so quickly to our assistance, on what must have been no more than a rumor. But I will repay generosity with frankness. Yes, we have met with — not a disaster but a reverse — a miscalculation which may exact a greater cost for ultimate gain than we had estimated. One of our most hopeful experiments, undertaken for mankind at large — a global enterprise — has had consequences that some of our experts did not anticipate. On us will fall the weight of the cost. This great discovery was to have been given to the world at the next Inaugural — at which I have once more the honor to preside — instead of which it will have to be another challenge to face crisis. But we are brave. We will face our losses and as the old literature used to say, 'Casting our bread upon the waters and sowing in tears we shall reap in joy, for after many days we shall find a new harvest.' We do not therefore ask you to help. Nor do we appeal for a dollar. We ask only for your sympathy. And your ready inquiry at the first breath of rumor shows that we have that."

Yang rose, bowed, gave a signal with his hand, and the images of himself and his Commissar wavered, became iridescent round the edges, and suddenly on the coving of gray glass there was nothing.

"Can you beat it?" It was the President's voice. "Switch us off," he called. "But can you beat it? Glad of our sympathy: touched by our rushing to his aid: won't ask a dollar. Chase, we're out-of-date. This is the new war. This makes war obsolete."

"Mr. President," it was the Secretary of State speaking, "please understand that I don't understand all this. What has happened? The Secret Service report and the return of the Chief of Staff — surely there is no need of such precipitancy! If war is obsolete, diplomacy becomes even more essential."

"Did y'ever hear, 'Time and tide wait for no man'?" Place cut in,

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"That's what we're up against. Did y'ever hear another old wisecrack: 'Between the Devil and the deep sea' — well, that again describes just where we've been put. Chase, show'm those maps and charts: I must think and think fast. The frontal attack of frankness has failed, been jiu-jitsued by that mealy-mouthed Mongolian."

The silence was disturbed only by the shuffling sound of the charts and maps as Chase and the Secretary of State handled them. Staccato on this whisper came the tapping of the President's thumbnail on his teeth.

"But Mr. President," the Secretary of State had turned to the large man filling the chair, "if this preposterous evidence and these three reports mean the same thing — the tidal records, the building preparations on the one-hundred-foot contour-line and the Supreme Commissar's statement — even then we must be circumspect. Why rush to such wild conclusions? Granted there has been an unparalleled miscalculation by the USSR experts; that may only mean a vast dislocation, perhaps a disaster for *them*. Don't you see, they will be the first to suffer? Diplomacy doesn't make a man an idealist but it does teach him that men act in the light of their own obvious interests! Why should this master of half the world cut off his nose in the hopes that we shall have an attack of sneezing?"

"That's stuff for the papers. Look at those maps again."

"Well, it's clear he'll lose first and lose more heavily."

"Surely you know your Yang by now? Do I have to remind you that our dear yellow brother doesn't like Russians any more than he likes Americans? Don't you see that he's going to kill a whole covey of birds, drown a whole flock of geese with one flush? Of course he'll inundate a great deal of Russia, and holy Leningrad will go under the sea where he's long wanted it, and the Moscow river will swallow up the corpses of the two Founding Fathers he's so anxious to have forgotten. And the USSR will be turned permanently East — by literally sinking the West! Cortez burned his ships and so conquered Mexico. Yang drowns his bridge to the West and so Orientalizes Communism."

"You mean —"

"Do I have to cross the t and dot the i in 'Inundation'? Sure, its got a large but neat inevitability about it! Armies, Chase? Why, Pharaoh found himself up against this when he chased Moses into the Red Sea. Armies! Why, they're now no more use than Lewis Carroll's 'Seven Maids with Seven Mops' trying to sweep out the tide. That's exactly it! Can't you get the hang of it? Why, everyone heard of the possibility thirty years and more ago. Don't you see, *he's succeeded in using atom-energy to melt all the frozen tundra and he's well across the Arctic Ocean by now!* isn't he, Skelton?"

Skelton nodded.

"And as gently as a mother rocking her child to sleep, he'll drown Lenin-

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grad — good for him — London, better — New York, best — yes, and swamp this little burg. Perhaps the Capital Dome will stick out like the Ark on Ararat, but more likely than not, fishes will be breeding in the cornices of this very room. Oh, it won't be the sudden rush of a monster tidal wave," again he looked across to Skelton who nodded, "It will be quiet as a summer dawn. We'll have time — *time to do nothing!* For nothing can be done to stop it. All we can do is to get ready to bear Yang's brotherly 'Be brave, how I sympathize, I've been through it myself!' Where's Diplomacy now? Sunk — with Chivalry. What's the use of sending an army and bombing the USSR cities? Will that stop the tide coming in and continuing to rise? Now that it's started it goes on by itself, this giant melt, like a house once it's well lit continues to burn after the fire-bug has cleared off."

To the Secretary of State's protest, Skelton added, "The President's right. Everyone interested in Geophysics has known that. If you once start the melt — and once you had the Atom open you could — then you'd upset the cold-balance at the Poles. It's simply a hangover of the last Ice Age. Once those packs of Ice, and the snow that throws the heat back into the sky, are both melted they won't reform. Yes, we are headed for a warmer and damper place than ever we thought we'd see this side of the grave."

"And we've just got to wait," it was the President again. "That's what gets me! Oh, yes, we can spend our time becoming the most unpopular President that ever was, in telling people that nothing can be done. Nowadays that damns an Executive. He's got to say he could do something about a total eclipse if the people say they wish it put off. I'm in a tighter jam than even the last Depression President. We can spend our remaining spell of office moving population to higher land. Go west, young man, go and sit above the one-hundred-foot contour-line and then the one-hundred-and-fifty perhaps, and always be ready to move up still a little higher. Hitch your wagon to a star or at least your pants up to your neck! But I can't guarantee when you'll ever be able to sit down again! We'll end like one of those pictures of the Deluge out of the old illustrated bibles, all that remains of us huddled along the foothills of mountains, looking across the new ocean that once was the plains of the United States. And the USSR will be sitting comfortably on the bracing heights of the tablelands of Tibet and China. That's precisely right, isn't it, Skelton?"

"Yes."

"But Mr. President," it was the Secretary of State still holding on to his Mid-Twentieth Century common sense, "I still can't see that on such a wild gamble Yang could really hope to win. . . ."

"Well, if you will live in the past, go read history. In the dear old days Revolutionaries never minded sink-

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ing *half* their own lot if they could drown *all* the other side."

That, though, brought up the Chief of Staff in support of the Chief Diplomat:

"It's a matter of terrain, Mr. President, and as a soldier I don't see that the one-hundred-foot or even the one-hundred-and-fifty-foot depth need sink us so deep as to make all that difference. At the worst we'll stabilize there. And then we'll be able to talk turkey — trained free men against a flock of frightened and driven slaves. Human nature hasn't changed: the old laws of war won't melt just because the ground is a bit wetter. We'll win!"

The President wheeled on him, but the slam was a kindly one: "You soldiers! Of course you can't surrender. Well, I guess you wouldn't to any man — I give you that. But try and be a modern for a moment. You're no longer up against Yang. You're up against a power that no one has yet beaten — Nature. Nature set off its balance and determined to sit down again. Except that now we are in its way! That's all. Yang doesn't count. Get him out of your mind. He was simply the trigger, the blind rat that bored the dike. Only a fool wastes his last precious moments trying to bludgeon the vermin once the water's coming through."

"But it will reach its level, and then . . ."

"That's what people were saying when the first shower fell after Noah had closed the Ark! You think a President is simply a man who has the first ringside seat at the political circus to watch the interminable act called, 'Which way will the cat jump?' That was, maybe, but now it isn't. President now means the man who sits in front. D'you suppose I'd have tumbled to this ahead of all of you if the bare notion hadn't ever crossed my mind before? Do you suppose a man who has to, and likes" — he shot a sudden grin across to Skelton — "to listen to experts, never puts all their twos and twos together and never gets some very odd and big answers in consequence! Well, I'll tell you what this has confirmed for me — it's the confirmation of two big beliefs that have been forming in my mind for some time. But now they're no longer beliefs, they're facts. First: Armies are gone! Oh, yes, we still have terrain, we still can maneuvre on it. But," and his voice rose, "now we march, wheel, and deal in the vastest game of strategy man has ever played — and we play it with entirely mobilized peoples. And we play it against — Nature itself! We, a land animal, an incurable air-breather, play it against wholesale drowning. No wonder history begins with the story of man's fight with a world-drowning flood! This is the real ordeal, not by battle — that was a mere interlude — but the early first form, by water. Yang, like an old wizard — see how the last science and the first Myth have at last met — has challenged us to a trial of skills, of magics, and the loser is to be swept

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off the face of the land, sunk for good and all. You're still hoping that the Deluge will be only a demi-deluge. I'm not. I know better. No, I'm not going to be deluded by a vain hope. I've told you, I've seen two of my most secret and awkward beliefs come true. I've told you one — that armies are gone. They're no more use than human sacrifice so far as changing events are concerned. Now I'll tell you the second — why armies will never have a chance again, why we'll never get a chance to get our second breath — why, in fact, Yang chose to do this, to put us at this hour on this spot. Why, because he's calculated that *he's* got the terrain! He'll lose, of course — prodigiously. And you'll concede that he won't care so long as we lose *more*. And here I'm on his side, so far as reckoning goes. He's right. A President, if he's a real one, spends quite as much time with maps as with men. Maps, proper maps, are just the other side of the man problem. Here, look at these, here in my flat desk-drawer —" And he whisked open a wide, shallow drawer and drew out a layer of colored maps. "These show heights. That great span of brown is the huge area of Tibet stretching away to the Pamirs and the Samarkand region and out over to the Gobi and Central China and upper Burma. That's the one great tableland of the world. The Pivot of the world, don't geologists and geophysicists call it?"

"Yes, Mr. President," confirmed Skelton.

"Incidentally, it holds up no-one-knows-how-much water locked as ice, and when melted off it will be one of the richest areas in the whole earth. So you see, Yang has huge areas to move onto and fresh waters to release, waters that will flow of themselves as the temperature rises when the Arctic is thawed — he won't even have to waste another atom bomb on his own highlands. Secondly, not only has he the highland of the world and we the low, but I've studied what happens when water really gets going. Of course, if the water alone had to mount, perhaps it wouldn't go above the one-hundred-and-fifty-foot line. But that's not the way things actually work in this delicately balanced world of ours, that seems so solid. Why, there're situations in which even my feather-weight might make a difference! When I was looking after some big coastal reclamation jobs — in my first Cabinet post — I saw the readings. When quite a shallow tide comes into a channel, the sea-floor actually sinks under the weight — isn't that so?"

"Yes, the effect was first measured on the floor of the English Channel," the expert confirmed.

"When the tide comes in for good, the ground cooperates — for good. It founders, just like a ship. Mark me, we're in for a real subsidence, to match the actual inundation. The two'll play into each others' hands. The Ministers'll say, The Earth is washing her hands of us. Perhaps they're right. We're certainly none too clean a lot." Then he roused himself. "Well,

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here's my message — decode it if you can: I'm Bulling the Ocean and Bearing the Land, in this biggest gamble in all history!"

There was a grim silence. Then General Chase pointed to one of the maps. "But if you're right and the seas' appetite will grow with land-eating, won't Yang's new harbors, as shown on these photos of mine, go under too?"

"He has probably calculated on that too! Cold-blooded brute, he wouldn't care! For all we can see these may be simply sham buildings to make Yang's people feel safe, until they too founder with everyone else under the two-hundred, three-hundred or four-hundred-foot line, while himself and his hordes enjoy the increasingly salubrious uplands of Tibet and its wide outskirts. For one thing is plain: every inch that the water mounts over us leaves *him* ten miles or more of ice and snow-field nicely thawed out and henceforward blossoming under a mild and friendly sky!"

They turned to Skelton.

"True enough," Skelton nodded, "they'll probably be no more snow in the world's middle regions for good. Every glacier will gush down floods, every snowpeak shoot down its ice sheet into the puddle *we'll* be in. Yes, the climate for those who can keep their heads above water is most promising!"

The Secretary of State was no longer protesting. He mopped his forehead, saying over and over, "And *no* way out!"

"We're driven in, wings and centre!" echoed the General.

But that last phrase somehow roused the Big Man.

"What are you saying?" he questioned in an almost absent-minded way. Evidently something had been started in his mind. They waited but all they could hear him saying, and evidently to himself, was: "Wings Centre." Then suddenly he lit up. "You said Wings and Centre, didn't you?"

He had turned to Chase who had nodded puzzled.

"Doesn't that make you recall something? Don't you remember hearing of that as a boy? Don't you know that because of that, when we all had our backs to the wall in the first world war, we decided to make one man have one chance to pull us out? And it was because he had said just that!"

"I remember what you're recalling," said Chase, "It's the phrase, isn't it, 'My left wing is driven in, my right wing is driven back, my centre can't hold — I advance!' "

"That's it. Don't you see?"

The other three, Skelton included, looked black, even dismayed. Had optimism made this big man incapable even of acknowledging defeat by Nature itself? But his next remark was cool enough. "True, it came to me in a flash. I'm not saying there is a way out. But I am saying that there could be a way *on* — if we have the nerve. If the people will follow a really

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daring lead. I mean something can be done and by all the Founding Fathers, I'm not going to stand on this sinking land and just let the people founder! Something *can* be done and I'll do it!"

He was speaking with command. They gathered round. He was now quite the coolest of the foursome. He took a large sheet of blank paper and spread it on the desk. He picked up two pencils — one with red lead, the second with green. The other three gathered round the huge man, who quickly sketched a rough outline-map of the world. Then he drew in heavy, wavy lines of color. The silence showed the degree of attention he had aroused. Then the President spoke:

"The green lines show the coastline as it will be when the present melt has all flowed out into the oceans; and the red lines show — well, the other possibility. Am I correct, Dr. Skelton?"

"Mr. President, I couldn't chart a more accurate prognosis myself."

The other two turned to the big man in the chair. "But you can't! You mustn't! It's absolutely out of the question!"

"Can't! That from a soldier! Mustn't! From a diplomat!" The President was in full bellow. "I tell you, there's just one thing I can't and won't do, and that's to tell the people I can't do anything! I'm Irreplaceable because in every jam I have done *something!* Gosh, don't any of you yet know the A.B.C. of politics? I've got a chance to do something — to put the initiative back into the hands of the U. S. And by hell and high water I'm going to do it! And my last word is this — my p.s. to the code message I gave you a moment back: By and large I'm still Bearing the Land, but now I'm betting Yang will get a new ocean and I'll get a new land!"

He gave them a moment, sitting back in his chair glaring up at them. Yes, he was right, he knew; the man who has something to suggest, a line to take, however wild that line, always wins against those who say you can only sit down under it.

"Skelton," he called. "Sit down on the other side of this desk and figure out what force it would need. You can, can't you?"

"Yes, that's pretty simple. The rough figure's been known for quite a long time both for the power needed and the mass to be reduced. Just give me a few minutes."

Place handed him all the charts. The others waited, standing on each side of Place's chair. The tap of Skelton's pencil on one side of the desk and of the President's thumbnail on the other made a miniature tattoo.

In a few minutes Skelton handed a sheet of paper over the desk. Place looked at it and then passed it over to the Chief of Staff:

"There're your instructions. Figure out at once how many you'll need — and don't spare the planes. Have 'em posted with sealed orders and a Zero hour for taking off when I give the signal."

His ascendency was now complete.

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General Chase bowed.

"Ring me up as soon as you are ready," and the President nodded him toward the door, then turning to the Secretary of State:

"Get the Ambassadors together at once — here. I'm going to give 'em a conference — one for the books, the history books. Be as quick as Chase."

When the Secretary of State was gone, Place disposed of his third guest:

"Thanks," he said. "Your visit was worth three hundred seconds. Now all you have to do is to keep your mouth shut and forget you were ever here. My secretary will get you out." He buzzed for her, and handed over Skelton.

"So that's the great man," thought the bewildered researcher as the private elevator sank him to ground-floor level. "As long as he can do something, he's just as gay as a bird."

Left alone the President yawned, looked down on his huge bulk, remarked in a whisper, "Weight must be still going up," then with a chuckle, "Well, the fatter you are the better you float." Then he swung himself forward, took a pencil, and began to jot down notes. A few moments later, with his head on one side, he spoke over a passage or two, nodded, again muttering to himself, "Can't see it's worse than the Gettysburg Address. Place, my boy, you may sink physically but you're up for a high place in History — Time's ever-rolling tide will have to roll quite a bit before it'll drown you!" He smiled and when the desk-phone buzzed, said in high spirits, "Let 'em all come!"

Shortly after the Secretary of State appeared, the first of their Excellencies began to report. Place had chairs ready for them. It would be quite a meeting. Evidently they had sensed something big was afoot. All the chairs filled rapidly. Place had told the Secretary of State to make an urgent appeal for their presence. Now the Secretary of State rose and told the meeting that the President had called them because he wished to confide information which concerned them as much as himself. It was regrettable that the Ambassador of the USSR could not be present — he had been called home just lately. "But we have a quorum," the Secretary smiled, and sat down.

Certainly the President's address interested them. So much so that probably the peroration, which to him was the part he prized most, they hardly remembered when they got outside. Even their own phrases, in which they had tried with diplomatic correctitude to hide their reactions, now seemed hardly worth putting in their diaries-for-memoirs. But they were quite good in their way and characteristic. The British Ambassador was, of course, called on first, since he was the Hyphen leading to the rest. Lord Blasket at the moment thought he was doing pretty well with, "Well, Britannia's always ruled the waves and by George, now she'll do it in earnest." The Italian confessed that he wished he had someone

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more worthy to speak on such a theme: "Ah," he said, "if only now we could hear Savonarola himself! What a sermon the dread Fratre of San Marco would give us on his favorite text, then directed only against the French," he looked lightly at his Gallic colleague, " 'Behold I bring a flood of waters on the earth!' " It was a good enough *bon mot.* But the *mot juste* belonged, of right, to the Frenchman:

"Gentlemen, we have lived to surpass the Bourbons. After all, the famous phrase of Louis Quinze was mainly a phrase of inflation. But now we shall put real water into *Après moi, le Déluge.*"

When the Secretary of State had ushered them out to make their reports to their Governments he came back for a moment with his Chief.

"They take it quietly?"

"Well, there's time. People'll get used to anything, if you give 'em time and something to do in the spell between. I've given them the timetable for the upper line I drew on the map. Europeans are getting used to being bossed around and milled this way and dumped that way. It'll only be one more population shift."

Place, though, was restless and when his desk phone buzzed through again, he took it hastily. "Yes, Chase? . . . Yes, everything's set here. Now give the Zero hour at nine P.M. tonight. Weather's all right at the farther objective? Good, good, just my luck again. And good enough in the other direction? Good, good — that's all." He hung up and turned to the Secretary of State. "Now get me a world-wide hookup and full network distribution. I'll have what I want to say ready in twenty minutes. Isn't much to say. Just want to polish a period or two — this won't be forgotten readily. Better leave something worth writing into the record!"

If he had felt misgivings the cloud had gone, and already he was jotting down some fresh phrases as the Secretary of State left the room. He only stopped when the microphones and their attendants entered. The full T.A.V. — Tel. Aud. Vis. — set-up was deployed round him. The flashes had been going out for twenty minutes, calling to the radio-netted world to *Listen, urgent! Listen, urgent! Washington has a key message. The President's going to speak to the world!*

Place's speech began: "Peoples of the earth, this is an earth proposition. I'm speaking not for one people but for all — for mankind. This isn't a time for comments. It's for information — not for rumor or recrimination, but for facts. I'm speaking to you right across frontiers, not because I'm President of the United States but because I know what you've got to know — and right now. I'm speaking over all frontiers because the frontiers are going, are melting, are being sunk. The very geography you've known, that mankind's always known, is at this very moment being wiped off like old lines on a slate. We can't try to put things back — that's impossible. All that's

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gone for good. We can't look back — we've got to go on."

He then told the world briefly that the Arctic Sea ice-field was melting, the huge Tundra of the Obi sub-arctic land-mass had already been thawed. The tides would gradually inundate all the Atlantic seaboards for a depth of at least eighty feet and probably one hundred, and this would then spread into the Pacific. These new sea-level heights would remain, be permanent. Every country therefore would shrink and men must move gradually onto the higher land. Their present ports would all be submerged.

"The USSR," he went on, "has pointed the way. They have prepared against a rainy day. They have built fine harbors in what till now was far inland. We must do the same."

Up to this point he had spoken with the quietness of a man demonstrating a proposition about which there is no controversy. Now his tone changed.

"I have to report to you that, although we have been slow, now we have followed suit and I can assure you that we have made —" he paused "a reply which puts us ahead once more. When I have ceased speaking, look at your maps. You are now involved in a world proposition and must think as Mankind, Unlimited — unlimited, at least, in a common liability." His voice became strident. "Look at your maps!" He picked up his own hand-drawn one, held it against him so that the world could see it on his chest. "Look: the USSR will have now a vast table-land on which to rest while you of the coast-lines must flee and shelter on mere spines of countryside, standing out above interminable lagoons. I am determined, I have determined, that this shall *not* happen. We will adjust, we have already adjusted, the balance of the old world in the new. *Our planes are already blasting the Greenland Ice Cap.*

"What does that mean? Why have I done that? It is the first phase of our answer. We have been challenged — challenged to see whether we, the free peoples, could stand the test, could endure the ordeal of facing the unleashed powers of nature. We were said to be soft. We were told that if we were really cornered, we would drown tamely like sunk rats. Well, we have taken up the challenge. We will not only go as far as we have been dared, we will go further. The Greenland Ice Cap is six thousand feet thick and has stored in it enough water to raise the sea level again, even beyond our challenger's calculations, and inundate even more of their lands and ours. For not only will all that subcontinent pile of ice come out into the seas with a new deluge — I am not using rhetoric, I am stating immediate fact — Greenland itself will rise. At present — but for only a little while more — it lies bent, buckled, and sunk under its load of gargantuan iceberg. Lift that weight and inevitably it will rear itself up as the coast of Norway rose and is still rising from its ancient ice-load, and as the Canadian ports on our own Great

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Lakes are getting shallower while Canada is still rising from the same cause and —" his voice deepened, "mark well the corollary: From the very same cause our American ports on the south shores of the Great Lakes are getting deeper. You see, my friends, not only is Greenland pouring a deluge to raise the ocean flood still higher, but as Greenland rears itself up, all these lands of ours to the south of Greenland will sink! Every plain of the world will be awash — but ours will founder deepest.

"So much for my first stroke. Have I not proved that we, the free peoples, when dared to show if we have courage, can snatch the initiative?"

He changed tone for an even deeper emphasis. "For, have no doubt of what I'm saying to you, we shall win because we know what we are doing; because we know, better than those who called for this showdown, what we are facing. *This is the end of man against man!* I know you are surprised at my saying that, but I know what I am saying. Our challenger has, I give him that, changed the whole story of man. We thought we were done with Nature and henceforward it — or He — would sit back and do no more than give us obediently the tools and arms we called for to beat each other down. Well, our materialistic friend has decided to call back Nature and to make the test, for us and for his side, which of us dares face that Power which he believes to be dead or blind and which I believe to be alive and all-seeing. Yes, the story has been changed, and it has been changed, I have a sure belief, in favor of those who have faith. Natural Selection is back again and that branch of the species shall survive which responds most creatively to the new conditions. That means, in short: Which branch will now have the greater daring? — which branch has more faith that Nature, the Creative Power, offers a new vision to those who have the eye of faith. Crisis is the code word for opportunity. And on your behalf I have seized it." He swung back into his swift narrative style: "I have bombed Greenland and at this moment it is pouring out its piled-up frozen waters and is itself rising like new bread. But that is only a beginning — the first phase of my reply, just an earnest of our full intention."

All this while he had spoken so that his huge figure appeared to the hundreds of millions in their television sets framed on a square screen of pale grey. It made a fine background on which his every gesture told. But now, suddenly, he stood aside. He had put himself alongside the screen and like a huge caryatid, he framed one side of it while his huge arm and hand ran along the screen's top. With his fingers he pointed down at the empty area. His voice called out, "Look!" The screen began to darken but the room in which he stood darkened even more swiftly, until he stood in a twilight, a vast portal figure pointing them to attend. A moment later and the voice out of

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the still thicker dusk boomed, "Watch!" At the top of the screen, now deeply twilit, appeared a small constellation of bright points which rapidly spread into a line. "That line," went on the voice, "is really a vast circle seen sideways. You are being shown by relayed television one of the greatest manœuvres ever executed. Now wait!" There was a space of silence in which the moan of distant airplane motors could faintly be heard. Then for a moment sight made the hundreds of millions cease to listen. For they saw that the base of the screen had suddenly taken fire. A score of huge fountains of flame leaped up, bursting into great blossoms of incandescence. At the top of the screen the small dots of light rocked, whirled, and spun like sparks above a bonfire. The field of vision on the screen itself heaved and swung. A modulated roar came through all the sets and riding on that ground bass could be heard the President's voice as though giving speech to the thunder. "You have just witnessed the greatest human act in history. You have seen the unveiling of a new continent, one that slept in ice until, through me, and for your sake and need, I have been permitted to call it to awake. You have been present visually at the baptism of fire whereby this new continent has become a living land. At this moment and in your presence I christen it the Homeland of all the Earth's Free Peoples, the cradle of a new and greater democracy, the capital of a civilization of Liberty and Brotherhood."

The apocalyptic vision on the screen rocked, whirled and vanished. The lights rose again and his familiar, friendly figure stood as before in front of the empty lit field. His tone was as friendly. "That mysterious land, the true Dark Continent, which you just saw coming to light — it has been awaiting this moment.

"Hidden under its vast load of ice it has been kept by Nature until at this hour He offers it, a new land, a new world, more new than America was to our Pilgrim Fathers. Today it is granted to those who are most free to dare, to believe — to us. At this moment I stand with you on a Pisgah, greater than that on which Moses stood, and you and I are looking out over a promised land infinitely richer, more promised and promising, than that he saw when he glimpsed Canaan. Our Jordan is the Ocean and the Ice, and already the Ark of Atomic Energy has gone forward in front of you and the ice flood that barred you from your new home of promise is rushing away from before your feet. Go up and possess it! There I shall move your capital. Already there are emerging mountains and noble valleys, fiords and tablelands. There are volcanic ranges pouring rich fertilizers on that already rich and unexploited soil. There lie minerals of all sorts and numberless radioactive lodes. And Heaven itself has cast upon it a blessing from above. For the mysterious Cosmic Radiation pours in most fully at the Poles and

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so on this, the one great polar land mass, now freed of ice, will come in that invisible light which alone can make plants and animals mutate and so give rise to endless new varieties, more fertile, more productive. There living will be far richer, and, once the price has been paid and the great trek made, there life will be far happier and easier than man has ever known. That is your land, your home. That is the prize which I bring to you from this super-contest to which we have been called, to which we have replied, to which we have risen."

He paused for he knew the exact time to let such stunning news sink into men's minds, for them to see the way he was pointing. And when he judged with his perfect sense of timing that they were reacting and that they would now be rising to query-point, he struck again.

"You say too-good-to-be-true. What about the Polar night? I promise you the ice will never reform. I promise you I would never have begun this thing. You now know, you now can judge, on whose shoulders that responsibility lies. This proud man, Yang — prouder than Xerxes, for Xerxes only strove to bind a small arm of the sea — this Super Shah has bid the Ocean itself rise from its bed, pass those shores where, as Scripture says, 'its proud waves shall be stayed, and inundate all the coasts of Earth, the ancient habitations of mankind.' But I have taken his bid, I have doubled the bid, I have out-bid him! In this final auction of the Continents I have made the winning bid, and to Yang is given only an Ocean, the Arctic ocean, which he has made ravenous and which will gnaw at his coasts. While to us is given a new continent. His central uplands on which he counted for his own security are lost to him already. For now that the vast masses of Ice from Antarctica will add vastly to the Flood, the whole climate of this planet will change. Snow will become a myth. Instead there will be warm rains and fabulous fogs. Not, though, with us at our safe retreat. But for him his temperate zone areas — look at your maps — will be wrapped in perpetual fog and enervating steam. For there is going to rise round this earth's middle a tropic belt beyond anything the world has ever seen since the Age of the Saurians. It will girdle the world from Capricorn to Cancer. It will be an impenetrable jungle, a final wall between our paradise and his choice."

He counted ten slowly to himself in silence and then his amazing voice hit an even deeper register: "Therefore I now claim for you this New Land and lead you to this, the Path of Peace — you the free peoples for whom I, the President of the United States, stand as Trustee. I appeal to you, have I not acted as the new Moses leading you into a land which this very day I have ordered to be unveiled — at the very moment we needed it most. And I now name this New Land the Territory of the United States — the central home-

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land of the democratic peoples of the Earth."

He paused to let his last statement have its full reaction, watching the small fluctuating green line in the liquid-filled disk-dial that showed, with its climbing miniature staircase, the piling-up number of radio-sets that were listening to him. Yes, he had the ear of half the world — his half of the world. So he swung vibrantly into his peroration:

"In the name of the Pilgrim Fathers I call upon you to rise and harness yourselves, to go forth on this new and greater pilgrimage. In the immortal words which henceforward will have a still higher overtone of triumph, I say — *Let us go forward in our great task that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*"

ABOUT THE STORY: *Some readers may feel that Mr. Heard's story is not a detective story at all. Your Editor is keenly aware of this possible reaction and would like to nip the criticism in the bud. If you are a purist who believes firmly that a detective story must follow an inviolate pattern — crime, investigation, suspicion, and final dénouement — if you measure a detective story only by strict formula, then Mr. Heard's tale may not* seem *to qualify. But the time has come — indeed, it is perhaps long overdue — to throw off those shackles of tradition that are mere artifice, mere mechanics. There is no reason why the detective story should remain chained to any hard-and-fast rules: a fine craftsman should be privileged, even encouraged, to break* any *rule if by so doing he builds a better murder-trap within the larger concepts of the basic form. And that is what we think Mr. Heard has done.*

The author of "The President of the United States, Detective" asks you to apply your imagination to some of the overfamiliar facets of the detective-story formula. It is not unfair on the part of Mr. Heard, or any writer, to expect his readers to use their own imagination: more writers should make that challenge, and more readers should accept it. For example: Mr. Heard places his story in the year 1977; he asks you to imagine that thirty years from now the people of this country will have matured sufficiently to elect as the President of the United States a man who is not only a politician but a trained scientist as well. Is that asking too much of your imagination? Isn't it quite easy to believe, in this atom-age, that the highest political office in the land may, a generation hence, be entrusted to a scientist? In the same way, Mr. Heard asks you to conceive, with him, of a sort of futuristic detective.

Once you have taken this first mental step, the rest is easy. The detective story is no longer the slave of chart, graph, or diagram: it now has wings:

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it soars: it is jet-propelled. See now how Mr. Heard's story merely extends *the old concepts. Is there a crime? Yes. True, it is no longer the murder of an individual, or even the mass murder of, say, a hundred people. It is the coldblooded, calculated murder of — literally — millions of people! It is even more than that: it is the murder of a nation — the murder of a continent — the murder of a civilization! Mr. Heard's conception is the most daring and original mass-murder idea since Mr. M. P. Shiel's "The S.S." Isn't such a crime worthy of a new type of detective, a criminologist of the future?*

In the classic pattern the commission of the crime (or the threat of it) is followed by investigation. Does Mr. Heard's detective investigate? Again — yes. President Place uses his office — you can't deny it — as a super-detective agency. His operatives are not mere gumshoemen, circa 1947: they are highly placed, responsible officials of the government — the Chief of Staff, the Secretary of State, and other cabinet members. The President himself is, in the fullest and most dignified sense, a glorified private eye: he senses the danger, marshals his forces, assigns investigations to his operatives, gathers the evidence, interprets the clues, deduces the nature of the crime, narrows the field of suspicion, pins the guilt on the "concealed" culprit, and finally takes those measures necessary to thwart the criminal.

Has one single element of pure detective-story technique been destroyed?

There is still another test. It has been said that the higher duty of a detective is to prevent crime rather than to avenge it. Even in this deeper sociological function, Mr. Heard's detective fulfills the larger demands of literature: he is a human being, not a cardboard silhouette. The fact that his assistants are important statesmen rather than hired investigators merely emphasizes the maturity of Mr. Heard's creative approach. For the President of the United States, as a detective, is not enmeshed in a picayune criminal affair. His client is not an individual seeking redress or protection: his client is, properly, the entire population of the country — more, the men and women of good will all over the world.

So, because Mr. Heard had the courage to make formula serve in the interests of a wider interpretation of the detective story, because he offers a new dimension in technique, because he concerns himself in plot with one of the most important issues of our time, thus dealing with a universal problem, because his literary attack carries the weapons of both deftness and irony, because he has written not only a detective short story but a serious short story as well — for all these reasons the judges of EQMM's Second Annual Contest unanimously awarded First Prize to "The President of the United States, Detective."

—Ellery Queen

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Ben Ames Williams is one of America's best-known writers. Author of nearly five hundred stories, most of which have appeared in "The Saturday Evening Post" and "Collier's," and of nearly fifty published books of which THE STRANGE WOMAN *has been a national bestseller since 1941, Mr. Williams has won an audience of many millions of readers in the last thirty years.*

In spite of his prolific record, Ben Ames Williams has seldom written detective stories. (At least, we have managed to discover very few of them; if we are wrong, Mr. Williams, by all means call the error to our attention!) But he has written crime stories, and we now bring you one of his finest efforts. "His Honor" is a tale of bribery — a common crime in real life, but not too common, oddly enough, in short fiction; and Mr. Williams, as you will see, has handled his theme with unusual artistry. His simple two-word title is inspired — a flawless gem of double-entendre.

Ben Ames Williams once wrote: "I believe in the potency of place and the impotency of man."

"His Honor" makes Mr. Williams eat those words.

HIS HONOR

by BEN AMES WILLIAMS

JUDGE HOSMER'S study was on the second floor of his home. Not a pretentious room. Calf-bound volumes on the shelves that line the walls; a comfortable chair under a reading light, a work table on which books, papers, pen and ink were usually littered; and a more formal desk where, in laborious longhand and disdaining the services of a stenographer, the Judge wrought out his opinions. There was a homely honesty about the room; a clean suggestion of common sense and fundamental decency; a certain uprightness. Rooms much used do thus at times reflect the characteristics of those who use them.

The Judge was, this evening, at the desk and writing. He used a stiff, stub pen; and he wrote slowly, forming the large characters with care, forming the pellucid sentences with equal care. He consulted no notes; it was his custom to clarify the issues in any case so thoroughly in his own thoughts that there could be no hesitation when the moment came to set those issues down. Half a dozen sheets, already covered with his large hand, lay at his elbow. His pen was halfway down another when a light knock sounded upon his closed door.

The Judge finished the sentence upon which he was engaged, then

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lifted his eyes and looked across the room and called:

"Come, Mary."

His wife opened the door and stepped inside. She shut it behind her, and crossed to her husband's chair, and dropped her hand lightly on his head. He lifted his own hand to smooth hers caressingly.

"Almost through?" she asked.

He nodded. "Another line or two."

"Jim Cotterill is downstairs," she told him.

The Judge seemed faintly surprised. "Jim?" he repeated. And added thoughtfully, half to himself, "Well, now."

"He says there's no hurry," she explained. "Says he just dropped in for a word or two. Just to say howdy."

"That's — neighborly," her husband commented. "Course, I've seen him every day, in court. But I haven't had a chance to talk to him. To ask him how things are, down home."

She nodded, smiling. "Another of your scruples, Bob?"

"It wouldn't hardly have looked right," he agreed. "The other side were doubtful, anyway, knowing I'd been attorney for the Furnace a few years ago, and knowing Jim and me were townsmen."

"I know," she assented.

"Case is finished, now, though," he commented. "Tell Jim I'll be through in fifteen or twenty minutes. You entertain him, Mary."

She made a gesture of impatience. "He makes me uncomfortable," she said. "I never liked him."

The Judge smiled. "Oh, Jim's all right. He's fat; and he's a little bit slick. But he means all right, I reckon. Give him a cigar and ask after his folks. He'll do the talking for both of you."

She nodded, moving toward the door. "Yes," she assented; and asked: "I haven't bothered you?"

The Judge smiled. "Lord, Honey, you never bother me."

But when the door had closed behind her, his countenance was faintly shadowed. Concern showed in his eyes, dwelt there. He remained for a little time motionless, absorbed in some thought that distressed him. In the end, there was a suggestion of effort in his movements as he picked up his pen and began again his slow and careful writing. Bethany Iron Furnace against John Thomas, David Jones, et al. His decision.

It was half an hour later that the Judge came out of his study to the head of the stairs and shouted down them: "Hi, Jim!" Cotterill, a certain impatience increasingly manifest in his eyes, had been talking with Mrs. Hosmer. He answered, and the Judge called to him: "Come along up."

Mrs. Hosmer followed the attorney into the hall and watched him climb the stairs. A short, bald man with a countenance that was always good-natured, but never prepossessing. She saw him grip her husband's hand at the top, panting a little from the ascent. They turned together toward the Judge's study, and she went back

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into the living room.

"This is neighborly of you, Jim," Judge Hosmer was saying, as he closed the study door behind them. "Come in and set. Have a stogie. I'm glad you didn't hop back down home without coming to say hello."

Cotterill's rather small eyes whipped toward the older man, then away again. "I didn't figure we ought to get together while the case was going on," he explained. Both men, meticulous and precise in their professional utterances, dropped easily into the more colloquial idiom of their daily life.

"Right enough," Judge Hosmer agreed. "Fair enough. But no harm now. How're tricks, anyhow? Folks well?"

"Yes, well enough. Were when I left. I've been too busy to do much letter writing, since I came up here."

"They have sort of kept you humping, haven't they?" the Judge agreed.

"Well, that's my job," Cotterill told him; and the Judge assented.

"Sure, that's your job."

A little silence fell between these two. The Judge, tall and lean, with bushy brows above his wide-set eyes, studied the fat little man with some curiosity. Cotterill seemed indisposed to speak; and the other asked at last: "Family all well, Jim?"

"Well? Sure. Fine."

"What's the news, anyway?" the Judge insisted. "I haven't heard from the folks lately."

The attorney leaned back in his chair, somewhat more at ease; and he smiled. "Well," he said. "Things go along about the same. Folks down home are right proud of you, Judge."

"Sho," said Hosmer, deprecatingly.

"Yes, they are," Cotterill insisted good-naturedly. "Yes, they are. I was talking to old Tom Hughes, when he sent for me about this case, in the beginning. He told me to give you his regards and good wishes."

"That was neighborly of him."

Cotterill nodded. "Tom's always been proud of you, you know, Bob. Course, being at the head of the Furnace the way he is, he runs a lot of votes in the county; and he's always kind of figured that he elected you. Helped anyway. Feels like he's done something to put you where you are. He liked you, when you were handling their business, too. I guess the Old Man kind of feels like you were his own son."

Hosmer's thin, wide mouth drew into a smile. "A fatherly interest, eh? Tom's a good old man."

"Well, he's not the only one down there that feels that way about you, Bob. You know how the folks there stick together. The men that amount to anything. Tom's bunch. Old Charley Steele, and Dave Evans, and that crowd. They've always been back of you. Sort of feel as though you were one of them."

"Best friends I've got in the world," Hosmer agreed.

Cotterill chuckled. "Matter of fact, it's right funny to see them watch the papers when you're sitting in one of these big cases up here. Bragging

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to strangers that you're from there."

"Yeah," Hosmer remarked encouragingly. He watched the fat little lawyer, an ironic question in his eyes.

"They're all getting ready to get behind you and push, when you run again," Cotterill assured him. "Dave Evans said here, just the other day, that you could get pretty near anything you wanted to, if you watched your step. It means a lot to have the home town folks back of you, you know. There's a neat bunch of votes down there, Bob."

"Sure," the Judge agreed.

Cotterill opened his hands with a frank gesture. "Of course, they're all watching this case, right now. It's pretty important to the Furnace, you know. Not much in this one case, but it's a precedent. Reckon it would cut into the business they do down there quite a bit if things went wrong. Tom says to me when we first talked about it: 'You got to win this case, Jim. If you don't, it's going to cost us money.' And what hurts the Furnace hurts the town."

He hesitated; and the Judge said slowly and pleasantly: "You're dodging around corners, Jim. What's on your mind?"

Cotterill swung toward the other, leaning a little forward in his chair. "Well—" he began, then hesitated. "Bob, you know my reputation, I guess?"

"I know you're reputed to be—successful," said the Judge. If there was in his word anything of criticism or of reproach, Cotterill paid no heed.

"I mean, you know, that I've the reputation of going right after what I want. No wabbling around."

"Have you, Jim?"

"And I'm coming right to the point now."

"Come ahead."

The fat little man hitched his chair a little nearer the other's. His voice was lowered. He gesticulated with a pudgy finger.

"First thing," he explained, "I want to be sure you understand just how important this is. To us, and to you, too. It's business with us; but it's a policy with you. That's what I want you to understand. They haven't asked you for anything because they helped you get started; and they don't aim to. Not for what was done for you then. But we can't afford to lose this case now."

Hosmer said slowly: "Case is finished, Jim. Decision is all written. It's in that envelope there." He pointed toward the top of his desk.

Cotterill shot a glance in that direction; and beads of sweat started upon his forehead. "That's all right," he said. "No need of going into that. I know I'm not much as a trial lawyer. I know I fell down on this case. Facts and law were with us; but I didn't get the stuff into the record the way I'd ought to, and some of our witnesses didn't stand up when Marston got after them. Marston's a good lawyer; but there's more to trying a case than the court end of it. I'm trying my case right now, Bob."

The Judge did not reply. He seemed

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to have settled into a certain stony calm; his eyes were steady and inscrutable. Cotterill waited for an instant, then swung swiftly on.

"Thing is," he said, "you want to figure whether you're going to stand with us, and have us back of you; or whether you want to stand with this other bunch. They were against you at the start. You know that. And they're not going to shift now, even if you're good to them. They'll just figure you're scared. You're coming up for re-election one of these days. Maybe for a bigger job. And if we're solid back of you, you can have anything you want. You know that, Bob. But if we split, you're a goner. There's the whole thing. You stick with us, and we'll stick with you. You throw us, and we'll — remember it. We're not asking favors for what we have done, but for what we figure to do. See?"

He stopped short, watching the other shrewdly. The Judge at first made no move, said no word. His eyes were thoughtful; and his glance was not turned toward the other man.

"Do you see?" Cotterill repeated.

"I — see what you mean," said the Judge, slowly.

"Then what do you say?" the fat man insisted.

Judge Hosmer swung slowly to face him. There was something judicial in his tones, even and calm; and his colloquialisms were gone.

"I'm not ambitious — in a political way," he replied.

Jim Cotterill watched him, marked the apparent hesitation in his answer; and the fat man licked his lips, and looked behind him toward the door with something furtive in his manner. Then jerked his chair still nearer to the other, with the buttonholing instinct always so strong in his type. And laughed in an unpleasant way.

"All right, Bob," he said. "All right. I get you. We're ready to meet you on that ground, too."

"On what ground?" the Judge asked tonelessly.

Cotterill whisperingly explained. "We know your affairs pretty well, Bob," he said, assuringly. "You've got a reasonable salary; but it's none too much. You like to live comfortable; and nobody blames you. Everybody feels the same way. There are a lot of folks that'd like to be friendly, help you out. If you wanted they should. And there are a lot of ways they could help you. Any way you like."

"What way?" Judge Hosmer insisted.

Cotterill's embarrassed reluctance, if such an emotion can fairly be attributed to the man, passed before the Judge's encouraging inquiry. "There's that mortgage," he suggested. "I know it's a burden to you. It ain't that you need the money. But maybe there are times when you fret a little about that mortgage. Well, Judge, you don't need to. Easiest thing in the world to have it tore up. All you got to do is say the word."

The Judge did not say the word. Cotterill pursued the subject.

"Maybe there's something else," he

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suggested. "I take it you're a business man, but I may be wrong. Maybe you don't know where to get any better than six per cent, for your money. If that's the trouble, we can help you, too. You don't know the market. Not your business to. But there are men that do know it. Fact is, they are the market, Judge. They make it jump over a stick whenever they like. Old Tom is in with them. And they'd be glad to show you the way. You wouldn't have to worry. You just open an account. Put in as much as you like. I can guarantee it's double and double for you, pretty regular. Handled right. You can call it a speculation; but it's not that. Not when the market is trained, way it is. You see how I mean?"

The Judge said nothing at all; and Cotterill threw out his hands with an insinuating gesture. "Or," he suggested, "it may be you haven't got any loose money to put in. That'll be all right. They'll carry the account for you. Carry it, and take care of it and whenever they make a turnover, mail your check to you. You cash it, that's all there is." There was no answering gleam in the Judge's eye; and Cotterill added hurriedly, "Maybe the notion of a check bothers you. It does leave a trail. But cash don't. And cash can be got. There won't be any trouble about that. Nor about how much. We're responsible people. So are you. Come on, Bob; what's the answer?"

The Judge said, almost abstractedly, and entirely without heat:

"You're interesting, Jim; but you're not convincing. You see, it just happens that I don't take bribes."

Cotterill twisted in his chair as though under a blow; and his fat face purpled with anger. He struck his fist upon the edge of the desk before him.

"All right! All right, Bob!" he cried hotly. "If you won't have it in friendship, take it the other way. You can't pull this high and mighty on me. You can't get away with it. What are you after, anyway? I haven't named a figure. You could have named your own, if you'd been reasonable. 'Stead of that, you've got to grow wings and fan 'em like an angel, or something. You can't pull that with me, Bob. I know too much."

"What do you know, Jim?" the Judge asked mildly.

Cotterill laughed. "Getting under your skin, am I? Thought I would. You think I'd go into this without making sure I had winning cards? I've looked you up, Bob. I've had you looked up. I know you, inside out. And I'll tell you flat, either you come across now, or everybody'll know you as well as we do."

"How well do you know me?" Hosmer inquired.

The attorney held up his left hand, the fingers outspread; and he ticked off his points upon these fingers. "This well," he declared. "Item one: You sat in the Steel case. When the decision was announced, the market went off. Robertson Brothers had you on their books, short a thousand shares. You made a nice little pile. Legal enough, maybe, Judge; but not right

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ethical. Would you say so?"

"Go on," said the Judge.

The fat little man touched another finger. "Item two: Remember the Daily trial, down home. Chet Thorne. Remember him? Witness for the other side. You was defending Daily. He needed it, too. He was guilty as the devil. Chet told the truth, first trial. But you got a disagreement, just the same. Second trial, Chet lied. You got Daily off. Well, we've got Chet. You can't find him, but we know where he is. And we've got his affidavit to why he changed his story. Oh, it was slick! Nobody could get Chet for perjury. Change didn't amount to enough for that. But it was enough for what you needed. You got away with it then; but Chet's ready to tell how you got away with it, now."

He stopped again, and the Judge inquired: "Is that all?"

Cotterill shook his head. "Not quite. Item three: The matter of the Turner Trust, and how it happened the trustee was short, and how the thing was covered up. You were the trustee, Bob. One, Two, Three, and there you have it." He struck the desk again, triumph inflaming him. "Furthermore," he cried, voice suddenly shrill. "Furthermore, the story's ready to spring. This afternoon, petition for your disbarment was filed down home. In a sealed envelope. And the whole story back of it's in type, right now, downtown at the *Chronicle* office. When I leave here, before midnight tonight, I'll hit a telephone. If I say one word, the envelope goes into the fire and the type is pied. If I don't say the word, the envelope's opened in the morning, and the story's on the street in the *Chronicle* before breakfast. There's the load, Judge." He shrugged ,his hands outspread. "Look it over. Simple enough. Be good and you'll be happy. Now what do you say?"

For a long moment, there was silence in the quiet room; and when the Judge spoke, it was in a gentle, but a decisive tone.

"Nor I've never permitted myself to be blackmailed, Cotterhill," he replied.

The lawyer stormed to his feet; he threw up his hands. "All right!" he cried. "Then it's bust for you."

The judge nodded. "Maybe," he agreed. "Of course, this is old stuff. A little of it true, and a good deal of it lies. Dates back ten — twelve years. Maybe you can make it go. I don't know. But I do know one thing, Jim. I know you're a dirty specimen." There was, abruptly, a hot ring in his tones.

Cotterill cried: "That'll do! You're through. No man can talk to me that way . . ."

Hosmer's long arm shot out; his fingers twisted into the other's collar. "Talk to you? Talk to you?" he repeated quietly. "Why, Jim, I aim to do considerable more than talk to you." His right hand swung; he slapped the squirming man across the cheek. Swung and cuffed Jim Cotterill to and fro in a cold fire of rage . . .

Urged him toward the door; half-

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dragged, half-thrust, half-threw him down the stairs; spurred his tumultuous exit from the house. A last stinging blow, and: "Git," he said.

Cotterill was gone.

The Judge's wife had come into the hall. Hosmer slowly shut the door, and he rubbed his hands as though they were soiled. There was trouble in his eyes, where the anger died.

Mary Hosmer touched his arm; asked softly: "What is it, Bob?"

He looked down at her; slowly shook his head. "Trouble, Mary," he said frankly. "He wanted to beg, buy, or steal the Furnace case. They've raked up those old affairs. The *Chronicle* will print the whole business in the morning. He's gone to release the story now. I guess folks will walk right by and never see us, tomorrow, Mary."

Comprehension came swiftly into her eyes; she cried rebelliously: "You've lived those old tales down, Bob!" He shook his head. "Anyway," she told him, "I'm glad you — kicked him out as you did."

The judge nodded. Then a slow smile crept into his eyes. "Matter of fact, Mary," he said, "this affair has its funny side."

"Funny?" she echoed.

"Yeah."

"Why . . ."

"I'd written my decision before he came upstairs," he explained. "I'd already decided the way he wanted me to."

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will include, in addition to two prize-winning stories:

HOUSE DICK by *Dashiell Hammett*

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPANISH SHAWL by *Agatha Christie*

STEPS GOING UP by *Cornell Woolrich*

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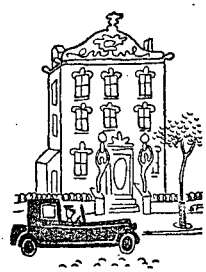
THE PRYING YORKSHIREMAN



Visualize a heavy-set, broad-shouldered, dark-haired man — five-feet-nine and weighing about 200 pounds — with a jolly face that somehow makes you think of a Dickens character — and one of the most winning smiles that ever lit up a human countenance — and yes, a pipe in hand, its stem never more than a few inches from his merry mouth, for he smokes a pipe the livelong day — picture all that and you have a mental image of J. B. Priestley, the famous English novelist, essayist, critic, and dramatist. Author of the immensely successful THE GOOD COMPANIONS *and* ANGEL PAVEMENT, *John Boynton Priestley began his writing career at the age of sixteen — indeed, his writing helped support him through Cambridge, where he took honors in English literature, modern history, and political science, all of which he implemented so notably in his later books which combine memories of personal history with mature social criticism.*

It was inevitable that the author of so picaresque a novel as THE GOOD COMPANIONS *should some day write a detective story — especially in Mr. Priestley's case, since he is fond enough of detective stories to endorse those he likes. (The dust wrappers of our own books published in England usually bear a six-word "quote" signed by Mr. Priestley in which he says simply: "I am an Ellery Queen fan." Love that man!) Mr. Priestley found his opportunity to detectivize in his series of short stories about Tom Hebblethwaite, the tall, bony, bespectacled Yorkshireman who, unlike Eric Knight's famous character, always has his two feet on the ground.*

In "An Arabian Night in Park Lane" the solid and prosaic Mr. Hebblethwaite takes a fling at high society. He attends Lady Gairloch's At Home and mixes, for one fantastic evening, in a "world of titles and diamonds and rouge and stars and ribbons." Perhaps it was because The Prying Yorkshireman was, to put it plainly, a gate-crasher, an uninvited guest, that the events of the glittering reception finally took on the hue of a veritable Arabian Nights adventure, subtly blended with Alice-in-Wonderland flavor; and in the end Mr. Hebblethwaite proved himself an amateur detective of considerable prowess. He had a story to tell his Luddenstall friends — a story they never believed but which you will revel in . . .

We cannot resist telling you one more personal fact about J. B. Priestley. He has two homes: one is an old house named Billingham Manor, on the Isle of Wight; the other is located in Highgate Village, a very charming re-

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gion in the highest part of London. But the fascinating fact is this: Mr. Priestley's London house was once the home of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the greatest English poets. What memories — of the Ancient Mariner and of Kubla Khan — must dwell in Mr. Priestley's study!

AN ARABIAN NIGHT IN PARK LANE

by J. B. PRIESTLEY

CHARLES WILLIAM EDMUND ALEXANDER GORDON-FITZSTEWART, the Most Honorable the Marquess of Gairloch, K.G., P.C., G.C.V.O., and Helen Victoria Mary Christina, his Marchioness, were At Home. They were At Home at Gairloch House to all the political and social luminaries of the town. The lower half of Park Lane looked like a particularly congested motor show of particularly large and expensive cars. Two linkmen stood at the bottom of the steps. Inside the hall was a double row of enormous footmen, who looked as if at any moment they would burst into a baritone chorus. In spite of the special police who kept moving things and people on, a large number of proletarians, mostly feminine, stood as near as possible to the steps and peeped through the great open doorway, fully convinced, no doubt, that this was better than paying money to see a musical comedy. The large and expensive cars deposited the social and political luminaries in great quantities, and these important personages passed in a glittering stream up the steps, through the hall, and then up the noble twin staircases that curved towards their hostess. Lady Gairloch smiled at them all. She was wearing all the family jewels, and though a not unhandsome middle-aged woman, she was so bejeweled and bright that she looked more like a successful Christmas-tree than a human being. After passing their hostess, the guests moved on into the enormous library and the drawing-room. Both these apartments seemed to be full of people, yet the twin staircases, the hall below, the steps outside, were not empty of new guests, who came on in a steady stream. It was a tremendous affair.

In a corner of the library, not so crowded as the rest of the room was, two men were standing very close together, talking in whispers. They both looked wrong. Their dress-suits did not fit them very well. They were not wearing any crosses or ribbons. One of them was tall, bony, and spectacled, and the other was very short and broad, with a face like raw steak, and enormous rough hands. This short man, however, had a perfect right to be there. He had been invited. He was, in fact, one of the somebodies, being Joseph Puddaby,

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the Trade Union leader, Member of Parliament for the Luddenstall Division in the West Riding, and formerly one of His Majesty's Ministers. The tall man was a fraud. His name could not have been found on Lady Gairloch's guest list. He was Mr. Tom Hebblethwaite, buyer for the Luddenstall Co-operative Society, in London on one of his frequent business trips. The dress-suit he was wearing — or partly wearing, for it was a shocking misfit — had been hired that very afternoon, when his friend, Joe Puddaby, had suggested that he should attend this reception, making use of the invitation card bearing the name of one of Joe's colleagues in the Labor Party, Jack Moorman, a grim proletarian who would have nothing to do with such hospitalities of the idle class. Mr. Hebblethwaite, curious as to what high society looked like, had allowed himself to be persuaded into this adventure, but he had been dubious about it. He still looked dubious.

"But you know, Joe," he was whispering, "when that chap called out 'Mr. John Moorman' and I had to go up and answer to it, I got in a fair sweat. I thought: 'What if somebody pops out and says I'm not Jack Moorman?' I'd ha' been in a nice mess."

"Oh, it's nowt," replied Mr. Puddaby. "There's so many here and it's all such a mess, they nivver know who's who. Don't you bother about that. Just tak' it all in while you are here. I thought you might as well see a do like this. There won't be so many more," he added, grimly. "We'll see to that."

Mr. Hebblethwaite looked about him. Most of the people were completely unknown to him, but there was a sprinkling of political celebrities whom he recognized from their photographs and caricatures in the press. Indeed, this affair was something between a theatrical scene in the grand manner and a political cartoon that had come to life. It was all very odd and bewildering. Mr. Hebblethwaite would have enjoyed it more, though, if he had not been conscious of the fact that he was there under false pretenses. This was his first intimate glimpse of high society, and so far he had not formed a very high opinion of it. A few, a very few, of the men looked really distinguished, and here and there were some beautiful women. But most of the women, even the very handsome ones, were too elaborately got up, too painted and bediamonded, for his taste. He made a few mental notes for the benefit of Mrs. Hebblethwaite, who would want to know all the details when he came to tell her about this party.

"I'll tell you what it is, Joe," he remarked. "If you take a good look at this lot — and don't bother about clothes and jewels they're wearing — they don't seem any better than t'folk you see at a Luddenstall chapel bazaar."

"They don't look as good, lad," replied Mr. Puddaby, chuckling.

"Yond old woman there'ud make a good advertisement for enamel,

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wouldn't she?" said Mr. Hebblethwaite.

At this moment Mr. Puddaby was wanted by a political colleague of the highest importance, and he had to leave his friend. Left alone, Mr. Hebblethwaite felt very uneasy. Most of the guests obviously knew most of the other guests, so people stood about talking in groups. If they moved from one room to another, as they frequently did, they did this in groups too. It was not pleasant being alone, and it was still less pleasant when you knew that you ought not to be there at all. Mr. Hebblethwaite moved about a bit, and tried to look, as solitary people often do try to look at parties, as if he was simply on his way to rejoin a vast group of friends in some distant corner. Once, an elderly woman with hollow, rouged cheeks, and a tremendous curved nose, rushed across to him and gave a little screech of recognition.

"How d'you do?" said Mr. Hebblethwaite, bewildered, for he had never seen this intimidating female before in his life.

No sooner had he opened his mouth than she realized that she had made a mistake. Her mouth closed with a snap. Her eyes froze in a ghastly and glacial fashion. And without a word of explanation or apology, she quickly turned away, leaving Mr. Hebblethwaite staring at her retreating shoulder-blades, which reminded him of plucked fowls. He told the shoulder-blades very quietly what he thought about them and their owner.

It was then that he first encountered the large man with the soldierly mustache.

"Excuse me," said the large man, staring hard at Mr. Hebblethwaite. "Are you Mr. Corcoran?"

"No, I'm not," said Mr. Hebblethwaite, who did not like the look of this large man with the soldierly mustache. He did not look like an ordinary guest. There was something vaguely official about him, though he was wearing full evening dress.

"Ah! There's a message for him, that's all," said the large man. "You don't mind my asking, do you? You're like him, but I see the difference now. You're — er — mister — er ———?" And he waited for the name to be filled in.

The query left Mr. Hebblethwaite with the alternative of refusing to give his name, which might look awkward, or, if he did give it, with the further alternative of calling himself Moorman or Hebblethwaite. If he called himself Moorman, there was a possibility that this man might know Moorman. If he gave his proper name, he declared himself an uninvited guest. That would probably not matter, so he risked it. "Hebblethwaite's my name," he muttered.

"Quite so, Mr. Hebblethwaite," said the large man, who then nodded and walked away.

Mr. Hebblethwaite very promptly moved off in the opposite direction. There was something about this large man, something about his soldierly mustache and his staring eyes, that he

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did not like. Five minutes later, as he stood in a corner idly watching the chattering throng, he felt that somebody was staring at him. He took a quick glance round, then saw, between two groups, about ten yards away, that soldierly mustache and those eyes. And the eyes were fixed speculatively on him. Mr. Hebblethwaite moved on again, and as he went, wondered whether he would not be wise to retire altogether. Joe Puddaby seemed to have disappeared.

While he was hesitating, he noticed that his fellow-guests were nearly all making for a door at the far end of the library, and he heard somebody say something about supper. This stopped his departure at once. It was just after eleven, and he was both hungry and thirsty. Moreover, there was no sense in attending a reception in high society if he failed to discover how and what high society ate and drank. No Yorkshireman could have left at such a moment. So Mr. Hebblethwaite went with the glittering tide, which swept through the door from the library, down some stairs, and into a long room nobly enriched with food and drink and attendant waiters.

"Champagne, sir?" inquired a waiter.

Mr. Hebblethwaite said he would. There were a great many curious and delectable things to eat, and Mr. Hebblethwaite, who had a large appetite, a sound digestion, and an interest in everything that was rich and strange, helped himself liberally. So did most of his fellow-guests. Mr. Hebblethwaite had always imagined that in high society you only trifled in a languid fashion with food and drink, but he soon saw that he had been mistaken. He noticed that elderly woman with the hollow rouged cheeks and the tremendous curved nose, the woman who had mistaken him for someone else. She was gobbling away furiously, like a ravenous old bird. "And I'd rather keep you a week than a fortnight," Mr. Hebblethwaite told her, under his breath.

He felt much better, more at home, now. He attributed this to the food. The fact that he drank, rather quickly, several glasses of champagne did not worry him at all. The crowded rooms had been hot and had made him thirsty, and the food was of a kind that only increased one's thirst. The champagne was beautifully cold and sparkling, and he drank it as if it were mere lemonade. The result was that everything looked bigger and brighter and Mr. Hebblethwaite began to feel at home, no longer a dubious stranger, an uninvited guest, a crasher of gates. A new sense of well-being invaded him. He was at peace with the world, even this world of titles and diamonds and rouge and stars and ribbons. They were really not bad folk at all, when you came to have a good look at them.

He, Tom Hebblethwaite, was a good fellow, a lucky fellow, too. If the large man with the soldierly mustache had turned up, Mr. Hebblethwaite was convinced that the two of them might have had a friendly

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talk. Such was his new mood. And it was at this moment that his adventures really began, that Lady Gairloch's reception suddenly took a queer turn and became an Arabian Nights entertainment with the result that Mr. Hebblethwaite had a story to tell that his Luddenstall friends never believed.

In happened in this way. Having eaten and drunk to his satisfaction, Mr. Hebblethwaite found himself wanting to smoke, and seeing several men help themselves to cigars from a number of boxes in a corner of the room, he made his way there, and selected a cigar of moderate size but excellent quality. Having lit this cigar, he was about to leave this corner of the room when he suddenly noticed his hostess, Lady Gairloch, who was leaning forward, talking earnestly to a lady who was sitting down, facing one of the tables. Among the many articles of jewelry worn by Lady Gairloch was a superb necklace of pearls. And at that moment, Mr. Hebblethwaite saw this necklace slide away from her neck and vanish. It looked like sheer magic, but there it was. Nobody else noticed it. Lady Gairloch herself was busy leaning forward and talking. Her companion was sitting down and looking another way. Everybody else there was busy eating, drinking, chattering. Mr. Hebblethwaite was sure he was not mistaken. The pearl necklace had just been quietly unfastened at the back and stolen.

He took a quick step or two forward, and was just in time to see a man move away from behind Lady Gairloch. This man bore no resemblance to any image of a jewel thief that had ever entered Mr. Hebblethwaite's mind. He was a little elderly man, with a very large, bald pink head, with bushy, gingerish eyebrows, and some gingerish curls remaining just above his ears. He looked rather like a round pink little animal that had rubbed off most of its fur. But Mr. Hebblethwaite was ready to swear that it was this little oddity who had just taken the necklace.

After moving away from Lady Gairloch, this elderly man stopped and gave a quick, cunning glance round. His eyes met the accusing gaze of Mr. Hebblethwaite, who was staring hard at him. At once his absurd face brightened. He gave Mr. Hebblethwaite a prodigious wink. Then he grinned, turned away, and disappeared into the crowd of eaters and drinkers and chatterers.

Mr. Hebblethwaite went after him. He managed to keep that bobbing pink head more or less in view down the length of the room, and was in time to see it disappear through the doorway. Still puffing away at his cigar, Mr. Hebblethwaite went through the doorway, too, and up the stairs, back into the long library, which was now almost deserted. But the queer little elderly man was there, and when he saw Mr. Hebblethwaite he waved a hand — as if they were playing a little game together — and trotted off again. He opened a

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door between two great cases of books, a door that Mr. Hebblethwaite had not noticed before, and vanished behind it. Mr. Hebblethwaite, fired now by the heat of the chase, did not stop to think at all, but followed him, and found himself climbing a short curving flight of stairs that brought him to the door, now standing open, of a cosy little room, obviously used as a small study. In this study, standing before the fire, was the elderly little man.

Mr. Hebblethwaite felt that this was no time to beat about the bush. "Look here," he began, abruptly. "I saw you take that necklace downstairs."

"You didn't," said the little elderly man, peevishly.

"I did," said Mr. Hebblethwaite.

"Then you've got a pair of very sharp eyes," the other remarked, still in an absurd, peevish tone. "And why the devil a fellow with spectacles should have a pair of very sharp eyes, I don't know. Nor does anyone else."

"You admit you took it," said Mr. Hebblethwaite, accusingly.

"I do, but only to prevent an argument. I hate argument. Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk," cried the queer little man, "and what good does it do anybody? Of course I took it, and you must agree with me that it was neat work, devilish neat. Wasn't it now?" He put his head slightly on one side as he said this, and looked rather wistful.

"Oh, I don't say it were badly done," Mr. Hebblethwaite admitted. "And I doubt if I'd ha' noticed it at all if I hadn't just been looking that way."

"Well spoken!" The little man held out his hand. "I like the look of you. What's your name?"

Mr. Hebblethwaite told him.

"A damned odd name, too, if you don't mind my saying so," the little man continued. "But you're no worse for that, not a bit the worse. And I like the look of you. Well, you want to see that necklace, I suppose." With this he plunged his right hand into his left inside pocket and then his left tail pocket, and then searched his right inside pocket and tail pocket with his left hand. The result was astounding. On to a little table he poured a glittering heap of jewelry. There was the pearl necklace and several other necklaces, some bracelets, two watches, and some other miscellaneous articles of adornment that Mr. Hebblethwaite had not time to examine.

"By gow!" cried Mr. Hebblethwaite, staring at this heap of gold and platinum and precious stones. "You've had a good haul, haven't you?"

The queer little man chuckled. "Neat work, y'know, very neat work, Mr. Pebblebait," he exclaimed, with satisfaction. Then he leaned forward, confidentially. "Mind you, I don't say I haven't done better. I've done much better, much, much better. But this isn't bad, is it?" He ran his fingers caressingly through the heap of jewelry. Then he stopped, and looked

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very cunning. "Wait a minute, though. This won't do. We can't stand here like this, looking at these things. We ought to be disguised. I've got them somewhere." He began ransacking his pockets again, and this time produced two false beards and several chocolates. "You see the idea," he went on very solemnly. "We've got to wear these if we're going to look at this stuff." And without more ado, he put on a very unconvincing gingerish beard, turning himself into a still more fantastic personage, and held out the other, a pointed black affair, to his companion. "Put this on at once," he commanded.

The evening had now got out of hand altogether and was taking on the quality of a monstrous dream. But Mr. Hebblethwaite still had some wits left, and these implored him not to don that ridiculous beard. He realized, too, that he had to do with a sort of harmless elderly lunatic, whose hobby it was, apparently, to steal jewelry, or perhaps only to pretend to steal it. Obviously, from his knowledge of the house and the way in which he coolly left the library and came up to this private room, he was either a relative or friend of the family. Meanwhile, as these thoughts passed through his mind, he did not make any attempt to put on the beard.

This annoyed the little man. "Put it on," he cried, his voice rising almost to a shriek. "Put it on, I tell you. We've got to be prepared for anything. What do you think I have these disguises for? Put it on."

To humor him for a minute or two, Mr. Hebblethwaite slipped the beard on. It hooked on to his ears quite snugly. And the sight of it there pleased the little man enormously.

"That's better," he cried. "Now we'll look over this stuff, though I can tell you now that it's not what I expected. Helen's parties are evidently not what they were. Have a chocolate."

"Nay, I've had enough tonight without starting on chocolates," said Mr. Hebblethwaite, from behind his beard.

"It seems to me, Pebblebait," said the little man, severely, "you don't know how to enjoy life. You haven't the technique. Now I" — and here he picked up a chocolate and crunched it solemnly — "like to enjoy myself. But then, I'm an older man than you are, and I know more about the world. That's true, isn't it? I should think it is — devilish true."

At this moment, a telephone buzzed at Mr. Hebblethwaite's elbow. His companion rushed across and at once picked up the receiver. "What's that?" he cried, impatiently. "Oh, yes, he is. He's speaking now. Yes. Must I? All right then; if I must, I will." He put down the receiver and looked at Mr. Hebblethwaite, whom he appeared to regard now as his confederate in some vast criminal scheme. "I'm wanted below," he said. "No, don't move. I'll be back in a minute or two."

"But I'm not going to stop here,"

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Mr. Hebblethwaite protested.

"You are. You must, or there'll be the devil to pay. Keep your eye on these trinkets. And have a chocolate. You must have a chocolate. I shan't be long."

He went out, still wearing his false beard. Mr. Hebblethwaite, also still wearing his false beard, was left alone in a strange room in a strange house, with a good many thousand pounds' worth of jewelry on the table in front of him. It seemed to him absurd to remain where he was. Obviously, the best thing to do was to take off this daft beard, creep downstairs and clear out of the house, leaving Lady Gairloch to discover her necklace for herself. But no sooner had he decided to go than quick footsteps sounded up the stairs outside, the door was flung open, and in came a most monstrous and unexpected figure. He was one of the enormous footmen that Mr. Hebblethwaite had seen in the great hall below. Mr. Hebblethwaite recognized him by his light blue footman's livery. But that is all that he could recognize, for this footman was wearing a black mask. Mr. Hebblethwaite stared open-mouthed at this apparition. The man might have come straight from a fancy-dress ball or the last scene in some light opera.

"Stay where you are, buddy," said this masked footman, advancing with a revolver in one hand. "Don't move. I'm here on business. I'm not playing hunt-the-thimble, don't make any mistake about that."

"What's the idea?" cried Mr. Hebblethwaite.

"Ah, there they are. I thought his lordship would bring his little packet up here with him. Very nice too, very nice! Stand farther back, you. Go on, stand farther back. The necklace, too. Oh, very nice, couldn't be nicer. Here, I'll take this lot, and you can have the rest, Rasputin. Fine!"

He grabbed the necklace and one or two of the other things, turned away and made for the door. Maddened by the cool audacity of this raid, Mr. Hebblethwaite sprang forward ready to risk the revolver. Evidently, the man had no intention of offering violence, clearly preferring to get away as soon as possible without making a noise. Mr. Hebblethwaite's hand touched the back of his coat, but that is all. The man gave one bound and was outside the room, and Mr. Hebblethwaite found the door slammed in his face, and not only slammed but locked. The man had taken the precaution of removing the key from the inside when he first entered, and now Mr. Hebblethwaite was locked in and was wasting a little precious time in rattling the handle.

"By gow, he did it on me right that time," he told himself, turning away from the stubborn door. What was to be done now? Should he use the telephone, and let them — whoever the mysterious "them" might be — know all that he himself knew? Or should he wait until the queer little elderly man — evidently Lord Somebody-or-other — returned, as he had promised to do? Though it was probably

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ridiculous to take any notice of his eccentric lordship's promises, for the pink little man was as mad as a hatter. Pondering these things, Mr. Hebblethwaite went back to the table and involuntarily his hand strayed to the remaining baubles. He felt far less giddy and exhilarated now than he had felt when he had first gone in pursuit of his kleptomaniacal lordship, but that does not mean that he felt any better. On the contrary, he felt worse. Things were still misty but were no longer pleasant. The sense of well-being had departed, with the ebb of that golden tide of champagne. He had a slight headache. He sat down, with the jewelry he had been playing with still in his hands. But he was not thinking about it. He was wondering what to do next.

What he did do next was to stare very uncomfortably at his next visitor, who stood in the doorway, surveying him, with a triumphant gleam in his eye and a contemptuous smile so broad that it could easily be seen behind the soldierly mustache. Yes, it was the large suspicious man with the soldierly mustache. The sight of Mr. Hebblethwaite appeared to give him great entertainment.

"Well, well, well!" he cried. "So here we are, nicely locked in, too. And here's some of the stuff, too, all ready to hand. Well, well, well! I'll say this for you — you're very clever up to a point, very clever. But like a lot of 'em, you don't take long reaching the point. Well, take the whiskers off. This isn't a children's party."

Mr. Hebblethwaite then realized, with considerable annoyance, that he was still wearing that beard, and he took the thing off and flung it on the floor. "I'd forgotten about that daft thing," he cried.

"There are several things you've forgotten, my friend," said his visitor.

"Now listen here," cried Mr. Hebblethwaite, "I can see you're beginning to fancy yourself because you think you've made a great catch. But you're making a big mistake."

"Of course, I am," said the detective, with tremendous irony. "When I asked you your name, downstairs, you gave me a name that isn't on the list of guests. My mistake, of course. Then I find you up here, in a part of the house that's private, and here you are, with a false beard on, and you're holding some stolen jewelry in your hand. My mistake, of course. You just happened to come to the party without being invited, didn't you? And you're just sitting up here to cool off a bit, aren't you? And you're wearing a false beard because you've got into the habit of wearing one at this time of night, keeps your chin warm — aren't you? And you don't know anything about those articles you're holding in your hand, do you? Oh, no." And the detective gave a very hollow laugh.

Mr. Hebblethwaite realized that he must appear the most suspicious of suspicious characters. Indeed, with such a case against him, he actually felt rather guilty. This man with the soldierly mustache — and really, when

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you came to think of it, he had "detective" written all over him — seemed to have been making him feel guilty half the night.

"Well?"

"As a matter of fact, what you've just said — about why I happened to be here and all that — is about right, near enough, any road. And it's fact I don't know anything about these things i' my hand. They were left here by somebody else, if you want to know."

"Go on," said the detective, smiling ironically.

"If you think I'm a crook like, what i' the name o' wonder d'you think I'd be sitting here for?" Mr. Hebblethwaite demanded, with some heat. "And another thing. Seeing you're so clever, you might explain how I come to lock myself in here. You must ha' noticed t'door were locked, 'cos you unlocked it."

Obviously this puzzled the detective, who began rubbing his chin. "Look here, let's have your story."

Mr. Hebblethwaite told his story, beginning with his acceptance of another man's invitation card and going on to his acquaintance with the queer little elderly man.

Here the detective broke in. "Ah, that's her ladyship's uncle, Lord Hornyhold. Bit off his head, of course. He's famous for taking things. Doesn't want 'em, y'know, but enjoys himself taking 'em. So you followed him up here?"

"I did, and this is part of his night's catch," said Mr. Hebblethwaite, "but the best lot's gone, and it's going now while we're talking." And hastily he plunged into an account of the visit of the masked footman.

"Now, that's serious," cried the detective. "That's just what I'm here to prevent. There are twelve of these chaps, and four of 'em are new, taken on for these affairs. A clever crook could easily work it that way. And all the same size and in the same uniform, and this chap was masked. You wouldn't know him again, would you? That is, even if he's here to know, though for that matter, if he's clever he will be."

"I'll have a shot at telling him again," said Mr. Hebblethwaite with determination. "Don't say nowt but just let me have a squint at these footmen chaps, and I'll see. And take this stuff. I don't want it." He handed over the jewelry.

"But don't try anything on, you know," said the detective, in a warning tone. "I haven't seen this crook footman of yours yet, don't forget."

They went quickly downstairs, to the hall, and there found eight out of the twelve footmen. Saying nothing, Mr. Hebblethwaite walked swiftly round them all, and then took the detective on one side. "You see that one there, him by the statue. That's him. Get that butler chap to ask him to come into a little room somewhere and then we'll see if I'm not right."

The detective took the butler on one side and whispered to him, and the butler gave the footman in question an order to wait upon two gentle-

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men in one of the small ante-rooms. The two gentlemen were there, waiting for him, and both gentlemen grabbed an arm when he made an appearance.

"I've got him," cried Mr. Hebblethwaite. "Now turn his pockets out."

The detective may have had his weaknesses but he was certainly good at turning pockets out, and in less than a minute he was holding up Lady Gairloch's necklace and the other missing things. There was no revolver, and evidently the man had thought it safer to get rid of that. It was not long before he was removed to a safe place.

"One of the new lot," the detective explained, "but a proper crook, of course, and clever, too. I believe I've seen him before. But how did you manage to recognize him?"

"Ay, well, we're not all so silly as we look," Mr. Hebblethwaite observed. "But if you want to know, I'll tell you. I just got my hand to his back before he got to t'door upstairs, and I happened to have a bit o'chocolate in my hand and it daubed his coat, and being a light blue coat it showed. Nobody could ha' noticed it if they weren't looking for it, but I knew what I were looking for and when I walked round 'em I found it all right."

"Smart work. And I don't mind telling you, you've got me out of a devil of a mess. Her ladyship had missed that necklace all right, but she thought her uncle had it, and the other things as well. It was the queer fellow, y'know, who rang up his lordship in the study on the chance of his leaving the stuff behind him. He must have been watching him when he was on duty in the supper-room. But look here, you've done me a good turn, and if you like, I'll take you to her ladyship now and tell her the whole story and show her what you did."

"No fear," cried Mr. Hebblethwaite. "If you want to do me a good turn, get me my hat and coat and let me get out o'this, and when I'm out, keep me out of it. I've had enough o' this high society. It's nowt i' my line."

"Suits me all right," said the detective.

"Well, then, we're both suited," said Mr. Hebblethwaite, not realizing that nobody now would believe his Arabian Nights adventure in Park Lane. "Let me get out quietly and off home to bed."

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One of EQMM's loyal women readers, being an ardent feminist in ferretry, wrote to your Editor and asked for information on female detectives in fiction. We promptly recommended our own anthology, the only "feminology" ever compiled, THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES, *now available in a Garden City, Blue Ribbon reprint called* THE GREAT WOMEN DETECTIVES AND CRIMINALS. *($1.00 — advt.) Of course, we should have guessed: our lady correspondent replied that she had read* THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES *from cover to cover. What she wanted was* more *information about girl gumshoes. Further, she informed us, she was quite familiar with all the one-shot exploits of damsel dicks — that is, she knew the stories in which distaff detectives cracked a single brilliant case and then were content to rest on their laurels — like that classic tale (Edgar Jepson's and Robert Eustace's "The Tea-Leaf") in which Ruth Kelstern proved herself a female counterpart to Dr. Thorndyke. What our constant reader* really *wanted was a list of those petticoat private eyes who had appeared in a* series *of cases. Well, we replied at length, and now it has occurred to us that perhaps other fans might like to have such a list handy. Here, then, in rough chronological order, are the twenty great female ferrets who have had criminological careers sufficiently extensive to be immortalized in book form:*

"Anonyma's" Mrs. Paschal
C. L. Pirkis's Loveday Brooke
George R. Sims's Dorcas Dene
Fergus Hume's Hagar Stanley
M. McDonnell Bodkin's Dora Myrl
Baroness Orczy's Lady Molly
Richard Marsh's Judith Lee
Anna Katharine Green's Violet Strange
Arthur B. Reeve's Constance Dunlap
Valentine's Daphne Wrayne
Hulbert Footner's Madame Rosika Storey
Agatha Christie's Tuppence Beresford
F. Tennyson Jesse's Solange Fontaine
Agatha Christie's Miss Marple
Mignon G. Eberhart's Susan Dare
E. Phillips Oppenheim's Baroness Clara Linz
E. Phillips Oppenheim's Lucie Mott
G. D. H. and M. I. Coles's Mrs. Warrender
Nigel Morland's Mrs. Pym

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That makes nineteen. The twentieth is our own favorite she-sleuth — Stuart Palmer's spinster schoolteacher, that super-snooper Hildegarde Withers. And here, for your delectation, is another escapade of the homicide-hunting Hildy, the bane and blessing of Inspector Oscar Piper's harassed heaven-on-earth . . .

THE RIDDLE OF THE DOUBLE NEGATIVE

by STUART PALMER

TWO MINUTES ahead of time, Miss Hildegarde Withers sailed into the Inspector's office at Centre Street, and found that grizzled little leprechaun of a man stuffing cigars into his vest pockets. "Oscar," said she, "this may come as a disappointment, but we have tickets for Carnegie Hall, not a burlesque show. They don't allow smoking."

Oscar Piper grinned. "The disappointment is all yours. Carnegie is off for tonight. I gotta pay a call — on one of the slickest murderers yet unhung."

"Unhanged, Oscar," corrected the schoolma'am automatically. Then she brightened. "Who, Oscar?"

"The name won't mean anything to you, since you were out of town last summer when it happened. It's Jedda Harrigan, of café society and the theatah. Come on, I'll fill you in on the case over a plate of spaghetti." It turned out to be *spaghetti con aliche*, mixed salad and easy on the garlic, and a bottle of Chianti, as they faced each other across the wine-stained table-cloth of a dark, aromatic little restaurant in the Village.

As soon as the food had arrived, the Inspector began, gesturing with a bread-stick. "I'll give it to you quick. If you'd been here at the time you'd probably have horned in on it. This Harrigan woman shot and killed her sweetie, who had backed her in a couple of Broadway turkeys. He was a Texas oil man, name of Kirby."

"I remember! 'Popsicle' Kirby — it was in all the papers."

"That's right. But not much got into the papers. The way we cased it, Kirby got tired and decided not to put up any more of his good dough on flop shows. We know he had booked a seat — one seat — on the Fort Worth plane for the next day, July eighth. He was packing his stuff in the big suite he had at the Larchmorris when somebody walked in and let him have a couple through the kisser. Maid found him next morning."

"No clues?"

"Nope. Nobody heard the shots, but the radio was on loud and she probably used one of those little pearl-handled jobs. The medical examiner

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found two .25 slugs in his brain, and decided he died around midnight, half an hour one way or the other. Nobody saw her come, nobody saw her go. Nothing to tie her to Kirby's death except that he had no other enemies — she was the only women he ran around with."

"It's an odd thing," Miss Withers said with a wry smile. "Whenever a man and a woman are linked, either by romance or marriage, and when one of them is murdered, the police always seize upon the survivor. Sometimes that thought makes me more content with my lot as a lonely spinster."

"Uh huh. Anyway, we got nowhere questioning the girl."

"Her fatal charm wound your men around her finger?"

"Not exactly. We all came to the same conclusion, that Jedda was guilty as hell. Ain't no other answer —"

"Any other answer, Oscar. Two negatives make a positive."

"Okay, okay. Anyway, we had to let her go, with an apology for holding her. Because she had an alibi that we couldn't even start to crack. She held off for awhile and then let down her hair and admitted that she had spent the night of July seventh, from dinner time until daybreak of the eighth, in the apartment of Bruce Tisdale, the actor who had played opposite her in the show that closed. Said she hadn't wanted to come right out and say it because Tisdale was married and his wife was off on a tour. Jedda also claimed that they were only playing gin-rummy."

"Unlikely, but possible. Go on."

"We kept Jedda in my office while one of the boys went out and quizzed Tisdale. He denied everything at first, and then when he heard that Jedda was down at Headquarters on a murder rap he broke down and made a clean breast of it. Yes, she'd been there all night. He only asked that it be kept as quiet as possible. So —"

"So Jedda must be a real siren, if a man would perjure himself and risk wrecking his marriage just to help her out."

"Never underestimate the power of a woman, as the ads say. She's got plenty of what it takes. All the same, suspecting and proving are two different prepositions. . . ."

"Propositions, Oscar."

"Okay, okay. Anyway a jury will always believe a witness who testifies under pressure to something which reflects unfavorably on himself. If Tisdale had volunteered his story, trying to clear her, that would have been something else. But it had to be dragged out of him. So we turned her loose and started over again. One theory was that Kirby had been killed by a hotel prowler he surprised in his room, but those sneaks don't kill as a rule and if they do they don't use a pea-shooter. So there you are. Of course we keep an eye on the Harrigan dame; we also let her know it."

"Oscar, is the Homicide Squad using psychological methods?"

"Something like that. Maybe it's time. You've said yourself that mur-

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derers are always under constant strain, trying to act innocent. It isn't easy to keep on playing a part."

"Unless one is an actress."

"According to the critics, Jedda Harrigan is the worst actress on the American stage. But judge for yourself. She phoned to ask that I drop in tonight, and if you like you can come along and play stenographer."

"I like," said Miss Withers firmly. "Things have been so dull lately that I welcome any case, even a warmed-over one from last summer. Only if you ask my candid opinion, Jedda didn't ask you over to hear her confess."

It was a sound guess. Jedda Harrigan received them in her small but beautifully appointed apartment on lower Park, and almost at once went into the role of injured innocence. She was wearing a filmy tea-gown, of an off-Dubonnet shade, which was a striking contrast to her dark brown eyes and straight ash-blonde hair, cut page-boy style. Her age might have been anywhere between twenty-two and thirty, Miss Withers decided. But of course the room was illuminated with amber lamps as flatteringly soft as candlelight. "Even I could pass for forty tonight," the schoolteacher told herself. "In the dark, with the light behind me."

Jedda flung herself down on the over-size divan, facing the Inspector, and leaving Miss Withers to find a hard mahogany chair. "I'd crack out the drinks," she began, "but I know you wouldn't take one, Inspector. They say that the police never accept anything, not even a cigarette, from anyone they suspect. What I want to know is this, Inspector: how long is it going on?"

Piper opened his mouth, but Jedda was quicker. "Don't say you don't know what I mean, because you do. How long am I to be persecuted?"

"Now, now, Miss Harrigan. The Department doesn't —"

"I'm just sick and tired of those beefy detectives you have following me just to make me miserable. Where do they come from, Central Casting? They all could double for Ed Gargan or Bill Bendix, and I don't think one of them could pour water out of an overshoe with directions printed on the heel."

Miss Withers, bent over her notebook, choked for a moment, and the Inspector glared at her.

"I'm asking for a showdown because this is important to me," Jedda went on. "I didn't shoot Mr. Kirby. Why should I shoot the goose that wrote the golden checks? If you do think I killed him, and want to try and prove it, then arrest me and let me stand trial. I'll promise you that I'll make you and the D.A. look like Keystone cops. And if you don't think I killed him, then call off your bloodhounds. You see, I happen to have a very important decision to make this week. You probably know that after Mr. Kirby's death they found that I was one of his insurance beneficiaries. He wanted me to be taken care of —"

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"Looks like he needn't have worried," said Piper dryly, with a glance around the apartment. "So Kirby expected something to happen to him?"

"Not at all. He was the jolly type, with no enemies. But he did fly a lot, and accidents do happen. Lots of people buy insurance as an investment. The amount is only twenty-five thousand, and my legal adviser, who also happens to be a personal friend . . ."

"Just a minute," cut in Miss Withers. "Didn't catch the name."

Something wary and defensive flashed in the dark brown eyes, and the smooth forehead was etched with tiny, wondering wrinkles. Then Jedda smiled coolly. "I didn't mention it. But it's Malcolm Browne, with an *e*. Browne, Hollis and Browne, Empire State Building. Anyway, Mal wants me to bring suit against the insurance company. It seems that when there is any question about a death they always hold up the payment pending suit. But while I'm under police suspicion for killing poor Popsicle, I mean Mr. Kirby, then I'm not going to sue. Would you?"

She edged closer to the Inspector, so that he almost sneezed at the reek of something expensive in perfumes. "As I said, this has got to be a showdown, Inspector Piper. I want you to announce publicly that I'm completely in the clear on the Kirby death, or else —"

"Or else what?" The Inspector's tone had rocks in it.

"Or else I'll go to the Commissioner and the Mayor and the newspapers. Hounding an innocent girl just because you can't find any other suspect!"

Piper shook his head. "Nothing like that. But we're keeping the Kirby case in the Open file until it's broken, sister."

"I don't care where you keep it. But I want the heat taken off me by Monday morning. If you don't, I — I'll hire the Pinkerton people to solve your murder for you, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

The Inspector removed his cigar from his mouth and stared at it. Then he nodded to Miss Withers, and arose. "I see your point of view, Miss Harrigan. We'll see what we can do."

"Never heard you so quiet," Piper said to Miss Withers as they rode down in the elevator.

"I wanted to listen, and watch her. It occurs to me that many times in my life I've been talking when I should have been listening. Oscar, that girl is either innocent or she's a better actress in person than on the stage. Of course, she could commit a murder. She belongs to the Cat People —"

"The *what* people?"

"It's a hobby of mine, classifying people according to the animal they most resemble in temperament. You, Oscar, are a terrier. I, in spite of the wisecracks that some people make about my appearance, am not of the Horse People, I'm more of the Magpie type, inquisitive and alert."

The Inspector restrained himself

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with visible effort. "What's this got to do with the case at hand? Come on, Hildegarde — I'm really in a spot. If she does what she threatens — "

"I think she will. She has the daring, the poise and selfish cruelty of her type. She caught you off base by putting her cards on the table — which is a little mixed, but you know what I mean. Of course, there is always a chance that she isn't guilty."

"I'll bet my badge that she is."

"In spite of Tisdale's alibi?"

"It's only in the movies that the most unlikely person is guilty. Jedda had motive — two motives, hurt pride and money. She had opportunity — he would have admitted her to his suite, maybe she even had a key. It's as plain as the nose on your face —"

"Which is very plain indeed, eh? Oscar, have you ever thought of working on this Tisdale person?"

"To bust the alibi?"

"Possibly, though that wasn't quite what I meant. If Tisdale loved Jedda enough to lie for her, why mightn't he have been the one to kill his rival? And it was Jedda who was making a false alibi for him —"

"You're just trying it the hard way. No, Hildegarde —" and here the Inspector flung his cigar at a plate-glass window, where it hung for a moment still smoking — "there ain't no use."

"Any use."

The Inspector ignored her. "Tisdale told a straight story, and while I don't believe him, any jury would. I've been waiting for Jedda to make a mistake, but she's too clever."

"Murderers are usually too clever. And there's still time for her to make a mistake, given a little help. Well, good night, Oscar." With a wave of her glove, the schoolteacher descended into the bowels of the Seventh Avenue subway.

"I was going to see you home," the Inspector called after her. But Miss Withers had no intention whatever of going home. Twenty minutes later she was ringing a doorbell in the lobby of the 57th Street studio building where Bruce Tisdale lived. The latch clicked and she went up the stairs wondering just what she would say to the chivalrous actor under these somewhat delicate circumstances.

But her worry was wasted. The door of the apartment was opened by a slight, elderly Chinese, his face as wrinkled as a cold-storage apple in May. He was wearing a suit of pinstripe worsted, which in spite of the neat darn on one elbow still smacked of Savile Row. "Very sorry but Mist Tisdale away out of town somewhere I don't know," he announced in a soft tenor singsong.

Miss Withers hesitated. "Are you a friend of his?"

The wrinkled face lighted up with a broad toothless grin. "I'm Fong, Mist Tisdale's boy. You make mistake, because I not wearing white jacket, I wearing boss's old suit like always when I have night off. Just leaving."

"I see," said Miss Withers, produc-

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ing a five dollar bill. "Have you any idea where I can locate Mr. Tisdale? Any out-of-town relatives he might be visiting?"

The "boy" chuckled again. "He has aunt Mis Allen in Ga'den City Lon Giland. Plenty old aunt, about like you. But I don't think he visit her when he goes away for weekend, not Mist Tisdale."

"He has a good many lady friends, then?"

The wrinkled face settled into an impassive Oriental mask. Miss Withers saw that it was time to try a different approach. "Confidentially, Mr. Fong, I am an investigator."

"You mean a detective, like Charlie Chan?"

"Er — yes, somewhat. Were you working for Mr. Tisdale last summer, at the time when — well, around July seventh?"

The apple-face bobbed twice.

"There was a murder committed that night. And a lady called on Mr. Tisdale, a Miss Harrigan. Do you remember what time she arrived — it must have been very late."

The apple-face moved sidewise. "Sorry. When Mist Tisdale expecting company he give me night off for play fan-tan."

"But was she — I mean, did you serve breakfast for two next morning?"

"Police ask me that too. But nobody here when I come home. But I tell you one thing, I know when Mist Tisdale entertain lady, he leave ash-trays dirty and plenty champagne bottles in kitchen. And I have to clean lipstick off his beautiful white silk dressing gown, much trouble."

"And you had that kind of trouble next morning, the eighth of July?"

He nodded. "Sure Mike."

"And you told the police?"

"Police don't ask. Why tell?"

Miss Withers thanked him and went down the stairs, somewhat disappointed. She had counted on breaking this impasse through what was presumably its weakest link. Or did impasses have links? She wasn't sure. She wasn't sure of anything except that she might as well go home and sleep on it.

"It isn't right," she observed to her tank of tropical fish as she turned out the light over their green wonderland and prepared for bed by giving her hair a hundred strokes. "Fate ought to take a hand."

By four o'clock next afternoon it appeared that Fate had done exactly that. As the Inspector was running through some routine reports on his desk he suddenly let out a whoop. "Look at that!" he cried, shoving a piece of paper before the surprised round face of the lieutenant in his outer office.

"What's so funny about another Missing Person, sir?"

"Nothing — except that this Missing Person is Bruce Tisdale, the pint-sized ham actor who went Jedda Harrigan's alibi."

"Oh, I get it. Say, Inspector, there was something else on him, just came in. Let's see — yeah, here it is.

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'Positive identification body of Bruce Tisdale, age 34, listed Missing Person this date, made Bellevue Morgue by nearest relative, Mrs. John Allen, Lenox Apartments, Garden City. . . .'"

"There goes Jedda's alibi but good," Piper said thoughtfully. "Okay, give it to the newspaper boys."

When the Inspector dropped in on Miss Withers a little later that evening, interrupting her in the middle of her dinner dishes, he found that she had already heard the news over the radio. "Very unfortunate, isn't it Oscar?"

"Unfortunate? For Tisdale, I guess. Nobody enjoys getting run over by a ten-ton truck. Funny angle, Tisdale being over on the East Side in ragged clothes. Looks like he was hiding out."

"Mmmm," said Miss Withers. "I meant that it was unfortunate in regard to the Harrigan affair. Now the fake alibi that Tisdale gave her can never be broken. . . ."

"That's where you're wrong. Tisdale never had to *swear* to that alibi, either in police court or anywhere else. He didn't even sign a statement, as it turned out. Thought I told you. So the thing is just hearsay — and to have a detective in court say that Tisdale said Jedda spent the night with him isn't a tenth as strong as to have Tisdale there to say it before the jury. Jedda's position is mighty, mighty shaky —"

Just then the telephone shrilled, and Miss Withers put down the dishcloth to answer. "Oh, it's for you, Oscar," she said. "Sounds like your office."

The Inspector barked his name into the instrument, and then listened. "Okay, be right down." He hung up and turned to Miss Withers. "St. Patrick's Day-in-the-mornin', but listen to this! Jedda Harrigan is down at my office with her lawyer, *wantin' to make a confession!*"

"Beware of the Greeks . . ." said Miss Withers. "But let us go, Oscar. This is one confession I didn't expect."

It was even more unexpected than that. They found Jedda sitting in the outer office at Centre Street, her gloved hand crooked in the elbow of a broad-shouldered giant of a man in rough tweeds. Malcolm Browne, of Browne, Hollis and Browne, carried a neat black-leather brief-case as a badge of his profession, but otherwise he looked as if he would be more at home in the Racquet Club than in the Court of General Sessions.

"Come on inside," said the Inspector shortly. "I'll get a police stenographer to take this down, and she can sign it later."

Mr. Browne agreed, in clipped Harvard accents. "Of course, this is a very regrettable situation, but I'm sure that when you understand you'll be sympathetic —"

"We're terribly sympathetic down here when anybody confesses to a murder," the Inspector told him.

Jedda cried: "Murder? Who said

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anything about murder?"

"All right, what is it? Did you park in front of a fire-plug?"

Jedda's hand slid softly into the palm of the handsome attorney. "I'll tell him, Mal. You see, Mister Inspector, I'm confessing that I told you a little white lie when I gave you my alibi for the time Kirby was killed. I said I spent the whole night in Bruce Tisdale's apartment. I spent the night there, but it wasn't with Bruce."

"It was I," put in Malcolm Browne gallantly and grammatically. Miss Withers nodded approvingly.

The Inspector sank wearily down behind his desk, looked at a fresh cigar, and then put it down unlighted. "Go on," he said. "We believe anything."

Jedda went on. "You see, Inspector, Mal and I have been in love a long time. We had to keep it a secret, because I was hoping that Mr. Kirby would back me in another show. You know how that is."

"And another reason for secrecy," put in the lawyer, "was that I was being taken into the firm of Browne, Hollis and Browne. My uncles would have thrown me out at the least breath of scandal. So since it was Bruce's apartment that we borrowed that night, Jedda begged him to say that he was the man. Being in show business, he lived by a much more lax code of morals, and he didn't seem to care much for his wife anyway. I think he'd have been happy to have her divorce him. And he'd been pals with Jedda for a long time. . . ."

"Such pals that after two weeks together in a flop show he was fond enough of her to give her an alibi? That doesn't hold water."

"It will hold in court," Browne said definitely. "Jedda and I will tell our story now — there's no reason for secrecy since Tisdale is dead. The publicity will be bad, but I guess we can face that together. . . ."

"We have a license," Jedda cut in. "I guess if we're married, that will cinch it for the jury."

Malcolm Browne looked at his watch. "I guess if you're ready to take our statements, Inspector ———"

The Inspector looked at Miss Withers, but she was merely smiling benignly at the happy couple. He shook his head. "Okay. Lieutenant Swarthout will take you down the hall and attend to that. I have had just about all I want to hear from you two." He leaned over his desk, resting his head on his hand.

The door closed behind the young couple, and Miss Withers came closer, sitting down on the hard chair beside his desk. "Don't be discouraged, Oscar. I believe that I have an extra ace up my sleeve. . . ."

The Inspector spat eloquently into his waste basket.

"And moreover, Oscar, I think there is somebody in your outer office. Just a moment." She crossed the room and opened the door, to admit a small, thin, very dapper man with over-long sideburns.

"It would make me very happy to learn just why I am supposed to be

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dead!" was his opening remark.

"Huh?" said the Inspector.

"I want to know why the Police Department released information to the newspapers and the radio, saying that I had been killed in a traffic accident on First Avenue this forenoon."

"Oscar, I do believe this is Mr. Bruce Tisdale," Miss Withers put in. "I think I recognize him from his stage appearances. . . . "

Tisdale made a short bow, and appeared a little mollified. The Inspector shook hands. "Funny thing, Tisdale, but your family had reported you missing. And your aunt came to the morgue, identified a body ———"

Tisdale snorted. "My one and only aunt broke her back in an adagio act fifteen years ago, and hasn't been out of a wheel-chair since. Believe me, I'm going to see that somebody loses his job over this mistake." The actor was working himself up into a big scene. "I am going to take steps."

"Before Mr. Tisdale takes too many steps, he ought to know that he is under arrest, hadn't he?" Miss Withers smiled pleasantly at them both.

"That's right!" The Inspector seized upon the straw. "You're under arrest on charges of perjury, giving false information, or accessory to murder. Anyway, you gave a phoney alibi to Jedda Harrigan for the night of the murder."

Tisdale shook his head. "I'll stick to that story, Inspector."

"You're stuck with it. It'll get you ten years. Hold out your hands."

Bruce Tisdale took one look at the bracelets which appeared suddenly from the Inspector's desk drawer, and then drew a deep breath as if about to make a speech. Instead, however, he fainted.

"One down," said Miss Withers happily. "And two to go."

But she helped get Tisdale into a chair, made sure that his heart still beat, and carried a lily-cup of water with which to bathe his forehead.

"When he comes to, he'll talk," the schoolteacher said.

"And right now, you'd better talk. What are you trying ———" Piper broke off as there was the sound of a bright, feminine voice in the outer office. Miss Withers grabbed the Inspector's wrist, and they both turned toward the door. Jedda Harrigan appeared all of a sudden, Browne and the lieutenant in the rear.

"Oh, Inspector!" she cried. "You and your friend here have been so kind and understanding that we thought you might be willing to act as witnesses at our wedding across the street. Because Mal and I know a judge ———"

Her voice went higher and higher and suddenly cracked thin and harsh as she took in the figure of Tisdale, stretched out in the chair with his legs akimbo. "What ——— what's that thing doing here?" Beside her, Malcolm Browne caught her arm warningly, but she went on. "Why did you bring that dead body here — did you think it would make me break down —"

Nobody said anything. Then the

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man on the chair moved feebly and opened his eyes. Jedda backed away in blank horror.

"You see?" said Miss Withers cheerily. "Mr. Tisdale will be all right. It was all a mistake."

The actor shook his head groggily. Then his eyes cleared. "Take it easy, Jedda," he said through thickened lips. "I won't let you down."

"You're sticking to your story then?" Piper pressed. "About the alibi?"

Tisdale nodded.

"Even though we have a signed statement from Miss Harrigan saying that you were not with her that night of the murder, but that she spent the night in your apartment with Malcolm Browne?"

Tisdale looked up at Jedda in shocked wonder. But she turned toward the lawyer, who quickly said "My advice to you, as your attorney ———"

"You're nobody's attorney," Piper cut in. "You're mixed up in this up to your ears —"

Miss Withers jogged his elbow. "Just a minute, Oscar. Could I see you for a moment in the other office?"

"Not now, Hildegarde —"

"Please, Oscar. And while we're gone, Mr. Tisdale can think of the position he's in. Because if Mr. Browne and Miss Harrigan were together in his apartment that night, that clears both of them — and it leaves him unaccounted for."

The silence in the room was thick as thunder.

"I'm not for a moment suggesting that Mr. Tisdale would kill Mr. Kirby in order to split his insurance with Jedda, while she arranged an alibi with Mr. Browne. . . ."

On that speech Miss Withers shoved the Inspector through the door, and closed it behind them. He caught her arm and for a moment she thought that she was going to be shaken thoroughly. "You'd better keep on pulling rabbits out of that funny hat of yours," he growled. "Because you've stirred up a nest of trouble. . . ."

She nodded happily. "Purposely, Oscar."

"And why leave them in there to agree on a story? That slick lawyer will coach them, and —"

"I'm hoping he will. Or coach Jedda. He loves her, I think, and therefore he isn't going to warm up to Tisdale very much. Oscar, don't you see? The case is all solved. Jedda can't escape the fact that she has sworn to two separate alibis — she didn't commit the murder because she was with Tisdale and she didn't commit the murder because she was with Browne. That's contradictory —"

There was the sound of a short sharp cry in the inner office, and a muffled thud.

The Inspector shoved Miss Withers out of the way, and flung open the door. Bruce Tisdale was out cold on the floor, and Browne, smiling a little, was massaging his knuckles.

"There's your murderer, Inspector," he said, pointing. "He tried to

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get away, so I clipped him."

"Oh, he did?" The Inspector looked at the barred window, at the locked door into the hall.

"I should have suspected him from the first," Jedda cried. "You see, he was so eager to give me an alibi — I didn't realize that he was giving himself one, in reverse. . . ."

The Inspector whirled on Miss Withers. "Now look what you've done! Instead of straightening this thing out —"

But the schoolteacher was beaming. "I've just solved your murder, Oscar — or rather, let your killer incriminate herself." There was the sharp gasp from Jedda, but Miss Withers went on. "Miss Harrigan swore to two separate alibis, which cancel each other. Two negatives make a positive, remember? I'm not saying that she didn't spend the night at Tisdale's apartment, *after* she killed Kirby. The lipstick on the white silk dressing gown proves she was there. . . ."

"She was there with *me*. You can't prove differently!" Browne cut in.

"That's right, Hildegarde. This won't hold in court. . . ." Piper said gravely.

"Won't it, though? Listen to me, Oscar Piper. I can prove that it was Tisdale who was the man Jedda spent the night with — prove it by the Chinese servant who had to take lipstick off his master's white silk dressing gown." She whirled on Malcolm Browne. "And don't you try to tell me, young man, that you borrowed the dressing gown just to be comfortable — *because no six-foot-two husky like you could wear a dressing gown that fitted a little shrimp like Tisdale!*"

Jedda jerked away from her fiancé, and the snarl on her face made Piper think that there might be something in the Cat People theory after all. "You fool!" she cried, and moved toward Tisdale.

"When he comes to, Tisdale will be a willing witness. He'll be delighted to tell us all about how you arrived at his apartment late that night and begged him for an alibi. Probably you said you'd found Kirby murdered — and was afraid you'd be suspected. . . ."

"I'll say it now — they can't frame me," grunted the man on the floor. "I hope she goes to the Chair. . . ."

"There's a good chance of it," Piper told him. "And both of you men will draw about ten to fifteen years for perjury and accessories after the fact. That'll be all ———"

There was a little more, however, as Jedda flung herself toward Miss Withers, with long fingernails, but eventually the prisoners were taken away, and the Inspector and Miss Withers were alone.

"I believe I'd like a glass of water," she said weakly.

"And I believe I'd like an explanation of how Tisdale's aunt from Long Island climbed out of her wheel-chair to identify a body at Bellevue. . . ."

Miss Withers sighed. "All right, Oscar. Just what is the penalty for impersonating an aunt?"

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In introducing Algernon Blackwood to Arkham House readers, August Derleth, the Sage of Sauk City, made this simple statement of fact: "Algernon Blackwood hardly needs an introduction to connoisseurs of the mysterious and terrible." And that is true: Mr. Blackwood has written more books in the genre of the supernatural than any other living writer (we are still quoting Mr. Derleth). Mr. Blackwood's short stories are a notable and permanent contribution to a most difficult literary form; tales like "The Willows" and "The Wendigo" are not only acknowledged masterpieces as evocations of terror, but are classics as short stories — there is a subtle distinction (and now we are quoting ourselves).

Mr. Derleth is not the only famous writer on Mr. Blackwood's bandwagon. The late H. P. Lovecraft, a modern master of the technique that projects supernatural horror, has given the most unqualified praise to Algernon Blackwood's work; Mr. Lovecraft wrote: "Of the quality of Mr. Blackwood's genius there can be no dispute . . . He is the one absolute and unquestioned master of weird atmosphere."

For a long time now we have wanted to bring you a story by Algernon Blackwood. We were reluctant to reprint one of Mr. Blackwood's overanthologized stories — not because they fade on re-reading, but because they are too readily accessible to any lover of the strangely macabre. So we kept seeking an "unknown" Blackwood — that is, unknown except perhaps to his devoted followers whose name, while not legion, is impressively large. And at last we found it — a tale of crime, and the terror of crime, that no reader with a spark of susceptibility will soon forget.

"King's Evidence," we hasten to reassure you, is not a supernatural story.

KING'S EVIDENCE

by ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

When Flanagan left his Nursing Home that November afternoon the last rays of the red sunset lay over Regent's Park. It was very still. The air was raw, but the sky was clear, if with a hint of possible fog to come.

Flanagan was on his way to South Kensington by the Underground. He was in high spirits. His fear of open spaces — agorophobia so-called — at last was really cured. He no longer dreaded to cross a square, a lawn, a field. This terrible affliction, inherited from shell-shock, was a thing of the past, thank heaven. For months he had been unable even to cross the open garden of the Home. Gradually,

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the specialists had weaned him from that awful terror. Already he had made small journeys alone. Now he was fit for a longer effort.

"It'll do you good," said the matron, seeing him off. "Go and have tea with your pal. An open space won't bother you a bit, and anyhow there are no open spaces on the Underground. Be back for dinner at seven o'clock."

And Tim Flanagan, young Canadian soldier, who knew nothing of London beyond the precincts of his Nursing Home, started off full of confidence. Exact directions — first right, second left, etc., lay in his pocket. To a man of the backwoods it was child's-play. He took the Underground at Regent's Park and reached South Kensington easily, of course. Then, leaving the train twenty minutes later and coming up to street level, he entered a world of blackness he had never known before, though he had read about it — a genuine London pea-soup fog.

"Gosh!" he said to himself. "This is the real thing!"

The station-hall itself was darkened with all its lights. He faced a wall of opaque, raw, stifling gloom that stung his eyes and bit into his throat. The change was so sudden, it amazed him. But the novelty at first stimulated him, accustomed as he was to the clear Canadian air. It seemed unbelievable, but it was true. He watched the people grope their way out into the street — and vanish. He hesitated. A shiver ran over him.

"Come on now, Tim Flanagan!" he said. "You know the directions by heart," — and he plunged down into the filthy blackness of the open street. First to the right, second to the left — and within five minutes he was completely lost.

He stood still, aware suddenly that he must keep himself in hand. He repeated calmly the directions he knew so well. But got them mixed. How many turns had he made so far? He wasn't sure. Memory was already out of gear a little. Too dark to read the paper in his pocket. Nothing to help him — no stars, wind, scent, sound of running water, moss on the north side of the trees.

Groping figures emerged, vanished, reappeared, dissolved. He heard shuffling feet, sticks tapping. Saw an occasional taxi crawling by the curb, the passenger walking. They loomed, faded, were gone. A swirl in the fog showed a faint light, and he staggered towards it and recognized an island. Thank heaven for that refuge! A figure or two arrived and left as he stood there, clutching the lamp-post. They asked the way, choking, he asked the way, coughing. They lurched off and the murk covered them. Like blind fish, he thought, on the ocean bed. But his confusion and bewilderment became serious, with unpleasant symptoms he thought done with forever. There were no carts, no taxis now, no figures either. He was alone, an empty space about him — the two things he dreaded most. He waved his stick. It struck nothing solid. In spite

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of the cold, he was sweating. And panic slowly raised its ugly head.

"I must get across to the pavement. I must cross that open space. I MUST . . . !"

It took him fifteen minutes, most of the way on his hands and knees, but the moment of collapse was close as he crawled along pluckily by the pavement railings — then saw a slight thickening of the fog beneath the next lamp, grotesquely magnified. Was it real? It moved. It moved towards him. It was a human being. If it was a human being he could speak to — be with — he would be saved. It came close up against his face. It was a woman.

He gasped out at it, pulling himself up by the railing.

"Lost your way like me, ma'am? D'you know where you are? Morley Place I'm looking for. For heaven's sake . . ."

His voice stopped dead. The woman was peering down at him. He saw her face quite clearly — the brilliant, frightened eyes, the skin white like linen. She was young, wrapped in a dark fur coat. She had beauty — beauty of a sort. He didn't care who or what she was. To him she meant — safety only.

There was no answer to his questions. She whispered — as though speech was difficult: "Where am I? I came out so suddenly. I can't find my way back . . ." and was gone from his side into the swirling fog.

And Flanagan, without an instant's hesitation, went after her. He MUST be with a human being. She moved swiftly, seemed sure of her way, she never faltered. Terrified he might lose sight of her, he kept breathlessly at her heels. She uttered no sound, no cry, not once did she turn her head. But her unfaltering speed helped to restore his own confidence. She knew her way now beyond all question. But two things struck him as odd — first that she made no sound — he heard no footsteps — second that she left a curious faint perfume in the air, a perfume that made him uneasy — connecting it somehow with misery and pain.

Abruptly then she swerved, so abruptly that he almost touched her, and passed through an iron gate — across a tiny garden to a house.

She did not turn her head, but he heard her queer whispering voice again: "I've found it. Now I can get back."

"May I come in too?" he cried, exhausted. "Don't leave me! If I'm left alone I shall go mad!"

There was no answer. She passed like a feather up the stone steps and vanished into the house. The front door, he noticed, was ajar already. Nor did she close it behind her. He followed her — into a pitch-black hall, then collapsed in a heap on the stone floor. But he was safe. The open spaces of the street were behind him. He heard a door open and close upstairs. Complete silence followed.

A couple of minutes later he struggled to his feet, switched on his electric torch, and realized at once that

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the house was untenanted. Dust-sheets covered the hall furniture. Through a door, half-open, he saw pictures screened on the walls, brackets draped. But companionship — human companionship was what he wanted — and MUST have — or his mind would go. He was shaking like a leaf. So he crept upstairs on tiptoe and reached the landing. Then stood still. His knees felt like blotting-paper.

He saw a long corridor with closed doors. And he cautiously tried three in succession — empty rooms, furniture under dust-sheets, blinds down, mattresses rolled up. At the fourth door he knew he was right, for the strange, unpleasant odor caught his nostrils. And this time he knew instantly why it brought pain and misery — anaesthetic, ether or chloroform.

His next glance showed him the young woman lying in her fur coat on the bed. The body lay at full length. Motionless. He had seen death too often to be mistaken, much less afraid. He stole up, felt her cheek, still warm. An hour or so ago she was alive. He gently raised a closed eyelid, but hurriedly let it fall again, and in the presence of death instinctively he took off his hat, laying it on the bed. His hand then, moving towards the heart, encountered a hard knob — the head of a long steel hat-pin driven up to its hilt. But his own private terror was now lost in something greater. He drew the pin out slowly and placed it on her breast. And in doing so he noticed a bloodstain on his finger. At which instant there was a loud clanging noise downstairs — the front door being closed. A frenzied realization of his position blazed into his mind — a dead woman, alone together in an empty house, blood on his hand, fingerprints on the door-handle and pin, body still warm, police!

The sinister combination cleared his brain. Heart racing madly, he switched out his light, and darted across the landing to the room opposite — seeing as he ran the flicker of an electric torch on banisters and ceiling, as the man holding it rapidly climbed the stairs. He managed it just in time. Through the crack of his own door he saw the outline of the man slip into the room where the dead — the murdered — woman lay and close the door carefully behind him. Only his outline had been visible, blurred in the deep shadows behind the torch he carried.

The one thing Flanagan knew was that he must get away instantly. He crept out, stole along the landing on tiptoe, and began the perilous descent with the utmost caution. Each time a board creaked, his heart missed a beat. He tested each step. Halfway down, to his horror, his foot tripped in a rod — with an uproar like a hand-grenade in his forgotten trenches. Concealment was now impossible. He took the last flight in a leap, shot across the hall, tore open the front door, just as his pursuer, with torch in hand, had reached the top of the stairs. The light flashed down on to him for a second? He wasn't sure. He

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banged the door, and plunged headlong into the welcome all-obscuring fog outside.

He ran wildly, fast as he could, across the little garden out into the street. The fog held no terrors for him now. His one object was to put distance between him and that house of death. Sense of direction he had none. There was no sound of steps behind him. For ten, fifteen minutes, he raced along. He must have gone a long way — a mile at least — when his legs failed him, his mind went black, his strength was gone, and the terror of open spaces rose over him like ice. He dropped in his tracks clinging to the cold, wet area railing — one thought only hideously clear in his brain before it stopped functioning — he had left his hat beside the body on the bed.

Unconsciousness followed. He had no recollection exactly — till a voice sounded, a man's voice, kindly.

"Can I be of any assistance? Come, let me help you. Take my arm. I'm a physician. Luckily, too, you're just outside my house . . ."

And Flanagan felt himself half-dragged, half-pushed into a warm, well-lit hall, the stranger having opened the door with a latchkey. A few minutes later, he was sipping whiskey before a blazing fire, trying to stammer his thanks and gratitude.

"Got lost," he managed to say, "agor — agorophobia, sir, you know . . . shell-shock . . . you've saved me. . . ."

And some fifteen minutes later, whiskey, warmth and experienced human sympathy had worked wonders. The doctor's handling of the terrified youth was masterly. Flanagan found fuller control come back. He even smoked a cigarette with pleasure.

"You know," the doctor was saying in his pleasant, gentle voice, "I rather guessed it might be shell-shock. I've seen so many cases . . ." as Flanagan now began to take him in more fully; elderly, with a very determined, implacable look sometimes behind what was a good, almost a benevolent face. A man not to be trifled with, he felt. "And I'm encouraged," the doctor went on smilingly, "to hazard a second guess — that you've had another violent shock too — quite recently." He looked hard into Flanagan's eyes. "Am I not right — eh? Yes, I felt sure of it." There came a little pause. "Now, why not tell me about it," came the suggestion, soothingly, yet with more authority in the tone. "It will help you — relieve your mind. Suppression is bad, remember. And we're complete strangers to one another. I don't know your name. You don't know mine. Tell me about it. Confession," he laughed, "is good for the soul, they say. . . ."

Flanagan hesitated. "It's too incredible," he mumbled, though burning to get it out of him. "You just couldn't believe it, sir."

In the end he told it, all of it, faithfully.

"Pretty tall story, isn't it, sir?"

"Tall, yes," came the quite reply, "but not incredible — as I know from

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many a strange experience." He paused and sipped his drink. "In fact, as one confidence deserves another," he went on, "*I* might now tell *you* of an oddly similar case that came my way. It may make you feel more comfortable," he added with skillful tact, "to hear *my* story. I won't give names, of course. It's about an officer at the front — great friend of mine — middle-aged, rich, just married to a young girl — a cheap, pleasure-loving sort, utterly worthless, I'm afraid. While he was fighting for his country, she took a lover. Planned to run away. Only somehow the husband got wind of it out in France. He got leave, too, just in the nick of time . . ."

"Well rid of her," Flanagan put in.

"Perhaps," said the doctor. "Only he determined to make that riddance final."

Flanagan gasped, but not audibly. And that implacable look on the other's face had hardened him a little. He listened more closely, he watched more closely, too. He was thinking hard. Reflecting. A touch of uneasiness stirred in him.

"Go on, please," he said.

The doctor went on in a lowered tone. "They met, he found out, this guilty pair, in an empty house, a house belonging to the husband. And the woman, using her latchkey, slipped in. She left the door ajar for the lover. She found death waiting for her. It was a *painless* death. Her lover, for some reason, was late. The fog possibly. It must have been a night rather like this, I gather. . . ."

"The lover," Flanagan whispered, for his voice failed him somehow, "the lover didn't come, you mean?"

"A man *did* come in," was the doctor's quiet answer, "but he hardly tallied with the description the husband had. A stranger, apparently. Saw the door ajar and came in for shelter perhaps — just as you might have done."

Flanagan felt a shiver run down his spine. "And the husband," he asked under his breath, "where was *he* all this time?"

"Oh," came the answer at once, "waiting outside — concealed in the fog. Watching. He saw the man go in, of course. Five minutes later he went in after him."

Flanagan stood up with a sudden jerk. "I'll be going," he said abruptly, and added some words of mumbled thanks. The doctor said nothing. He too rose. They passed into the hall.

"But you can't go out in the fog like that," said the doctor, quietly enough. "Why, you've got no hat. Here, I'll lend you one." And he casually took a hat from a row on the rack and Flanagan mechanically put it on his head. He didn't shake the offered hand. Perhaps he hadn't seen it. He went out.

The fog had lifted a bit. He found his station easily. Open spaces did not bother him.

In the bright light of the train he took off the borrowed hat and looked it over. *It was his own hat.*

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SPECIAL INTRODUCTION AND FOOTNOTES

By CLAYTON RAWSON,

CREATOR OF THE GREAT MERLINI AND FORMER ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF "TRUE DETECTIVE" AND "MASTER DETECTIVE"

Ellery Queen's request that I write an introductory note to a yarn that breaks all the Marquis of Queensberry rules in its highly disrespectful burlesque of the fact-detective story puts me in a pretty pickle. As a fiction writer I should be amused by Baynard Kendrick's story; as a fact-detective editor I should be indignant. To escape this dilemma and toss it right back in the Queen lap I have decided to make my introduction a parody of an Ellery Queen prefatory note. I guess that'll larn you, Ellery!

'Tec fans will greet this epoch-making masterpiece of murder with huzzas and dancing in the streets (white tie). EQMM fans will be tickled pink to learn the story has not previously appeared in any other language (including the Sanskrit) and comes to you piping hot direct from the typewriter on which the young prodigy, Baynard Kendrick (age 5½), writes his novels about Captain Duncan Maclain and his Sleeping Eye dogs, many of which (the books, not the dogs) are now collectors' items (paper covers, Dell 25¢ book-imprint, slightly cut, half-title smudged and bearing inscription: "To Lizzie B. with Love — Baby"). Your editor has a dark suspicion that the clue of that autograph in Kendrick's own handwriting may at long last solve the strange enigma of the identity of the accomplice who helped Miss Borden wield her famous ax.

The Kendrick typewriter (London, Smith & Wesson, 1860, Fourth edition, 12-gauge, vellum spine, flat feet) is also responsible for consistently referring to the head of New York City's Homicide Squad as an Inspector when that gentleman, in real life, is but a lowly Captain. This grievous detectival error which appears regularly in EQMM (by special permission of the copyright owners) and has been committed by nearly every detective fiction writer in the business (including Clayton Rawson) may soon be rectified by the newly formed League To Have Acting Captain Daniel J. Mahoney Who Heads The New York City Homicide Squad Promoted To The Rank Of Inspector To Save Face For The Mystery Writers Of America (Inc.).

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For the same reason The League is also petitioning Commissioner Wallander to have the Police Department's Homicide Squad which rolls from the West 20th Street Station made a part of the Homicide Bureau of the D.A.'s office in the Criminal Courts building and then transfer both offices to Police Headquarters in Centre Street where mystery fiction writers think they are located.

If you have nothing better to do, don't fail to read the astounding and utterly inexplicable Case of the Stuttering Sextant. Then burn this copy of EQMM before the F.B.I. find such a subversive libel in your possession. And please forward cake containing hacksaw to your Editor, Ellery Queen, Cell 69, Tier 13, The Tombs, New York City. I want out.

THE CASE OF THE STUTTERING SEXTANT

by

Lieut. Chief COLT DERRINGER,
Chief of Lieutenant Inspectors of the
Upside Downs Falls County Detectives.
As Told To
ROBERT MCSMITTY and SMITTY MCROBERTS,
Special Investigators
for
MASTER-STARTLING TRUE-REAL OFFICIAL CRIME STORIES MAGAZINE.
As Told To
BAYNARD KENDRICK

AN UNMENTIONABLE CRIME CLASSIC

Where could Chief Derringer find his answer? Out of the eerie railroad tunnel came this memory of an unborn infant to point a stuttering finger at his mother's betrayer!!

THE HOT DECEMBER day[1] was hot in the little town of Upside Downs Falls, bordering the banks of the Upsalandi River a short distance from Upsal County's seat of Upsal. A bitter cold torrent of melted snow swept down from the towering range of the Upsadaisy Mountains to pour into the grimly flowing Upsalandi River, as well as into the office of Lieut. Chief Colt Derringer,[2] Chief of Lieutenant Inspectors of County De-

[1] *Dear Baynard: Ellery says I should treat this just like any other manuscript that comes across a fact-editor's desk. Okay, here goes. Why are you concealing day of week, date, and year? Because it would tend to incriminate you? — CR*

[2] *The double r spelling you give the Chief's name throughout is an error no fact-writer worthy of the name would ever make. He would disagree with the dictionaries and spell it as do the firearms catalogues and as the name of the original inventor (Henry Deringer, Jr.) was*

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tectives of the friendly little coal mine town of Upside Downs Falls.[3]

The icy rivulets cresting about the feet of Lieut. Chief Colt Derringer (Chief of Lieutenant Inspectors of the U.S.D.F. Detectives) was no colder than the ice in the battle-scarred officer's warm heart as he bent his ear to the phone.[4]

Long after he had laid the receiver down and quit listening to the excited voice of Mrs. Rheta Masciewiscz, housewife, of 17–244 NE 275th Road, Maspeth Village, R. I.,[5] the icy waters continued to chill the officer's already blue ankles.

Playing about the entrance to an eerie tunnel during the seventy-two hours between trains, Arnheim Fortescue, 14, of 1801 Gravity Boulevard, high school student, together with his three companions, Terril Mitchalowski, 13, of 17–244 NE 275th Road, Maspeth Village, R. I.; Lucinda Gootchalk, 9, and Vladimir Gootchalk, 6 mos., all of the same address, and two of them nieces and nephews of Mrs. Rheta Masciewiscz, whose address was previously mentioned, had stumbled on a terrifying sight huddled in a corner of the tunnel.

Lieut. Chief Colt Derringer removed his feet from the water and courageously pushed a button.[6]

"Gosh," he philosophized, "it can't be true, and yet it must! There is no time to lose!"

He was thinking with the mind of a trained and courageous manhunter of the fact that Amanita Allsopp, the stepdaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Stablehouse, 6767 Upside Downs Highway, Upsal, had been missing some four months without results.

Despite the fact that Al Allsopp, her husband, address unknown, had been detained by officers Joe Thorpe, Ted Lynch, Ben Burton, Tod Taylor, and Chief Lieutenant Inspector Derringer himself, under suspicion, Allsopp had been able to explain the bloody ax he was carrying and the patch of his wife's hair on the blade.

"She was going to visit her mother," Allsopp had stated under oath. "I found this ax in the kitchen. I wasn't here when she left."

Questioned about the hair he explained without hesitation that Amanita was very tidy and must have cut herself while shaving.

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spelled. — CR

[3] *Upsal County is in what country? Since the December day is hot and since the trial procedure you describe later is English, I assume that the locale is South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand. But why don't you say which? — CR*

[4] *Judging from the date given later in the story, this case happened in 1833. Alexander Graham Bell did not invent the telephone until 1876. — CR*

[5] *Cannot find locality with initials R.I. in South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand. Or has Rhode Island been moved since 1833? If so please state circumstances. Important facts like this must not be omitted. — CR*

[6] *What kind of button? Electric, shirt or belly? And nowhere in story do you state result of button pushing. Is Chief Deringer withholding information from our special investigators? What is he trying to hide? F.B.I. demands immediate answer. Wire at once. — CR*

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Chief Derringer now decided to check up with Hannah Lenahan, pretty Red Cross worker of 1694 NE Eye St. SW, but Miss Lenahan could add nothing to the Chief's confusion.

"Amanita told me nothing of her plans," she admitted tearfully. "I had no idea she intended to disappear — and as for being murdered. . . ." Miss Lenahan dissolved into tears,[7] and was placed under the care of Dr. Michael E. Throgmorton, County Physician of Upsal County, whose office is at 17–244 NE 275th Road, Maspeth Village, R. I.

Still Chief Derringer wasn't satisfied. At his urging, Detectives Joe Thorpe, Ben Burton, Tod Taylor, and three bloodhounds, Tom, Dick, and Harry, all obtained from the Oswash County Penitentiary, agreed to continue the investigation.

The body in the tunnel, naked except for shoes, stockings, winter underwear, brassière, heavy woolen skirt and peekaboo blouse, was still wrapped in mystery.[8]

Who was the stuttering sextant?[9] Had this mysterious beauty been thrown brutally and bodily from a speeding train?[10]

The Chief determined to find out, although his letter to Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Stablehouse, step-parents of Amanita Allsopp, had brought no reply. Again and again the persistent Chief of Lieutenant Inspectors checked the address — 6767 Upside Downs Highway, Upsal.

"We still can't be certain he did away with her," said Derringer. "It may be a wild goose chase, after all. We don't even know she's dead."

"Quite true," agreed County Prosecutor Wm. E. Knappsack, his sharp eyes bloodshot from watching the bloodhounds.[11]

Chief Derringer wasted no more time. The body was immediately identified as that of Mamie Larhinx of Upsal Road, schoolgirl, 19; Emily Warburton, 17, housemaid, of Exeter Falls, a neighboring village; and Mrs. Amanita Allsopp, the wife of Albert (Al) Allsopp, address unknown.

The next six weeks were busy ones. Tireless, driven on by a fixed idea, Chief Derringer visited in turn Palm

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[7] *Miss Lenahan is not mentioned again and yet since she dissolved in tears she should be important part of solution. Or am I being precipitate? — CR*

[8] *You have not reported investigation I am sure an efficient police officer like Chief Deringer would have made to clear up the curious mystery of the missing hat. It suggests motive for crime and might implicate husband. Or it could have been stolen by a fiction writer who wanted it to talk through. — CR*

[9] *Body described is someone's daughter and sextant (an instrument for shooting the sun) could therefore not have been used. Please do not get murder weapons from some other case mixed up with this one. Or maybe you don't know how to spell sexton? — CR*

[10] *Photos you submitted with Ms. do not include one of train speeding through tunnel. Please obtain at once. Also send X to mark spot. Our supply exhausted. — CR*

[11] *A County Prosecutor's life is not a happy one. Has he tried eyewash? — CR*

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Beach, Miami Beach, Palm Springs, Yosemite National Park, Banff, and spent a tiring fortnight checking hardware stores, bars and grills, in New York City.

Not until he reached the little town of Pendexter, two miles from Upside Downs Falls, did he find a clue.

Arthur Livery, stableman, revealed that Al Allsopp had been there on July 17th and had rented a sleigh.

"I told him he was nuts," said Livery, "but he told me to mind my own business."[12]

From then on it was not difficult to trace Allsopp's movements.

Hans Schiffleman, hardware merchant (Main St., Upsal), identified the missing ax as coming from his store.

"It was bought by a man I can readily identify as Al Allsopp," said Schiffleman, readily.

Everything was at fever heat. Where was the missing ax? Who was the stuttering sextant?

Teletypes clicked out, "Pick up Allsopp!"[13]

Then on New Year's Day, Chief Derringer made a trip to Miami Beach where the police were holding Max Reamer, traveling salesman of Michigan Blvd., Chicago, who was wintering in Florida with his wife Betty and four children aged 7, 8, 9, and 10, all of the same occupation.[14]

On his return to Upside Downs Falls, Chief Derringer was greeted in his office by Deputies Fred Lynch, Tod Taylor, Ben Burton, and Joe Thorpe; also by County Prosecutor Wm. E. Knappsack, and Dr. Michael E. Throgmorton, as well as Daniel Webster, trusty in charge of bloodhounds for the Oswash County penitentiary.

"D-did you have a g-g-good time, Chu-Chief?" asked Webster slowly.

Derringer took a deep breath. "Let me see your fingers, Webster."

The bogus convict hung his head. Allsopp had been found posing as a trusty.

The Crown called forty witnesses, but ably defended by Messrs. Katz, O'Brien, and Herbert, Allsopp was sentenced to a hundred and ten years in the June Session of General Assizes. He was incarcerated in Oswash County Penitentiary, July 4th, 1834.

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[12] *Please explain why Livery thought Allsopp nuts. Locale has been established as southern hemisphere where July is coldest month of year. Furthermore I have affidavits signed by natives of the region (my secretary hails from the Upsom Salts mining country) attesting that July 17, 1833 was the date of "The Blizzard of '33." Please check your facts! I haven't time: I've got to go keep a lunch date with a lady hatchet slayer who wants to tell me how she made mincemeat out of fourteen of her Vassar classmates. — CR*

[13] *You have the teletype being used long before Don Ameche was born, an obvious impossibility. — CR*

[14] *Please state wife's age, weight, disposition, and sex. Also seriously doubt that the Chief could have completed the long voyage to Florida on New Year's day. Please have him verify this in writing and state whether he traveled by sail or steam. — CR*

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NOTE: In consideration for the persons concerned, the actual names of all persons and places, with the exception of Tom, Dick and Harry, mentioned in the foregoing story, have been withheld and fictitious ones substituted. Living professional models posed for all pictures with the exception of the duplicate bullets, the victim, the clay footprint, and Tom, Dick, and Harry. All dates are fictional except July 4th, 1834. All the writers are fictional except

BAYNARD KENDRICK[15]

[15] *Please verify last statement. Any writer who distorts fact as you do must be fictional. — GR*

Coming next month! *The Curious Case of the Fact-Editor's Sudden Death* — a True Confession written in hiding by a fugitive from justice, Baynard Kendrick.

EDITORIAL RIPOSTE: *Touché — and touché to you! Messrs. Kendrick and Rawson have taken your Editor for a ride — and we love it! But we take detectival delight in pointing out that neither Baynard Kendrick nor Clayton Rawson has made the maximum of his opportunity. Where, oh, where, does Mr. Kendrick's Lieutenant "run into a blank wall"? This unforgivable omission breaks a cardinal rule of fact-detective writing. And where, oh, where, do the Lieutenant and his assistant "exchange glances"? You can't do this to us! We'll sick Ed Radin onto both of you! —— EQ*

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In our July 1945 issue we commented on the number of Roger Sheringham short stories extant. We made the statement that until Anthony Berkeley wrote "Mr. Bearstowe Says" especially for EQMM, there were only two Sheringham shorts available to anthologists. One, of course, is "The Avenging Chance" — one of the ten best detective short stories ever written; the other we had in mind is a tale called "White Butterfly." This story is seldom reprinted; Mr. Berkeley himself does not consider it highly — in fact, he once described it as "of a dismal futility that puts it out of court for further use."

Well, the plain and unpleasant truth of the matter was that your Editor had been wrong. (Oh, yes, your Editor can be wrong; he has been wrong many times in the past and will be wrong many times in the future; indeed, some of his best "finds" among unknown detective stories have resulted from his being wrong, his admitting it, and his conscientious efforts to correct his mistakes.) Including "Mr. Bearstowe Says" there are not three shorts about Roger Sheringham — there are four. No less an enthusiast-of-the-blood than James Sandoe of Boulder, Colorado, called the oversight to our attention. Mr. Sandoe claimed that there was a fourth story titled "The Wrong Jar."

Obviously it was our plain and pleasant duty to check Mr. Sandoe's claim. We did, and Mr. Sandoe was right. So we promptly arranged to buy the "missing" Sheringham and pass it on to our readers.

Yes, we made the error — and we're glad of it!

THE WRONG JAR

by ANTHONY BERKELEY

"EH?" said Roger Sheringham sharply. "What's that, Moresby? — Have some more beer," he added perfunctorily.

"Well, thank you, Mr. Sheringham. I don't mind if I do. — That Marston poisoning case, I was saying," resumed the Chief Inspector, when his tankard had been satisfactorily refilled. "You've read about it, I suppose. Well, can you see that man Bracey poisoning his wife? I'm not sure that I can. Smashing her over the head with a hammer, yes; that's his type. But putting arsenic in her medicine? No, I shouldn't be surprised to hear that the local police have made a bit of a bloomer there. Not a bit I wouldn't, though that's strictly between ourselves. Anyhow, they didn't call us in, so it's none of my business. But if I were *you* . . ."

"Yes?" said Roger eagerly.

"You like poking about in that sort of thing, don't you? Well, if you were to go down to Marston and get in

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touch with this man's solicitors, and offer to do a bit of unofficial nosing around, I shouldn't wonder if you mightn't find something to interest you."

"Look here, give me the facts. I've hardly looked at a paper for the last fortnight. I thought the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of accidental death?"

"They did. But now the local people have arrested the husband. So far as I can make out, it's like this."

A certain Mrs. Bracey (said Moresby), living in the small market-town of Marston, in Buckinghamshire, found herself suffering from some gastric trouble, and called in her doctor. It was apparently a straightforward case, and the doctor treated her on normal lines. The treatment undoubtedly did her good, but she was still confined to her bed.

The Braceys were people of some consequence in Marston. Bracey himself was a builder. He had been trained as an engineer, but finding no opening in that line had bought up a local building firm soon after the war and set out to specialize in steel-concrete work. He had done very well, and the two had become as comfortably off as anyone in the neighborhood. So far as could be made out from the newspaper reports Bracey was very popular, a big, hearty, jovial man, with a greeting for everyone, whose workmen never went on strike. Mrs. Bracey had been a cut or two above him socially; her father was a regular army officer who had risen to the rank of major-general during the war; but she had never appeared to think that she had married beneath her. She was a particularly charming woman, and her husband, as everyone thought, worshipped her, while she was hardly less in love with him. A phenomenally happy couple, was the opinion of Marston. There were two children.

Mrs. Bracey's illness had seemed to be running its normal course, when one evening her doctor had received an urgent telephone call from Bracey to come at once to Silverdene (as the house was called) as his wife had suddenly been taken very much worse. The doctor, whose name was Reid, was surprised, as he had anticipated no developments of such a nature. He found Bracey apparently in a state of great agitation, and Mrs. Bracey very bad indeed. He did what he could, but she died in the small hours of the next morning.

Dr. Reid was no fool. A less conscientious man might have said: "Ah, well; gastro-enteritis; never quite know where you are with it." Not so Dr. Reid. He refused a certificate. The coroner ordered a post-mortem, and the cause of death at once became plain. Dr. Reid had been justified. Mrs. Bracey's body contained at least three grains of arsenic. A great deal more must of course have been administered.

The local police at once took the matter in hand with energy. The only possible vehicle of administration which could be discovered was a bottle of medicine, which on analysis was

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found to be liberally laced with arsenic. By exhaustive enquiry the police were able to account for every minute of the bottle's existence.

It was a new one. Dr. Reid had made it up himself after his morning surgery, an ordinary sedative composed of sod. bicarb., bismuth oxicarb., mag. carb. pond., with aqua. menth. pip., or in other words peppermint water. With his own hands he had corked it, wrapped it, sealed the wrapping, and given it to the boy to take round. When it arrived at Silverdene ten minutes later the seal was still intact. There was no possibility of the bottle having been tampered with on the way.

The bottle arrived at Silverdene at twenty-five minutes past ten. Bracey had gone to his office an hour before. The seal was broken and the bottle opened by the professional nurse whom Bracey had insisted upon engaging for his wife, although in such a mild case her services were hardly necessary. The directions on the label stated that a tablespoonful was to be administered every four hours. The nurse at once gave her patient a dose, and subsequent doses were given punctually at half-past two that afternoon and at half-past six. The bottle remained in the sick-room all day and under the nurse's eye the whole time except for one hour in the afternoon when she was off duty from three to four. During that time, it was established, Mrs. Bracey had been asleep and no one had gone into the room.

At about twelve o'clock Mrs. Bracey had complained of a feeling of nausea and just before her lunch she had been sick, which seemed to relieve her. This was such an ordinary symptom of her illness that the nurse had taken it for granted; and as Mrs. Bracey retained her lunch and seemed better for it, the nurse had felt no scruples about taking her usual hour off duty in the afternoon. Mrs. Bracey was just waking up when she came back, and complained again of nausea, accompanied by a burning pain in her stomach. She took her tea, but was unable to retain it. This too, however, had been a common symptom with her during her illness, and the nurse had no cause to attach particular importance to this manifestation of it.

Bracey got home about five o'clock, and at once went in to see his wife, who was again feeling better but still had some pain, though she concealed the fact from her husband. The nurse left them alone together, and Bracey stayed in the bedroom for about an hour, at the end of which he went down to the garden to get some exercise by mowing the tennis court. He stayed out till dinner time.

It was not until after the third dose of medicine, at half-past six, that Mrs. Bracey became appreciably worse. She and the nurse both attributed it to a normal development of her illness, and Mrs. Bracey insisted that her husband should not be informed as it would only make him worry unnecessarily. When he went up to see his wife before dinner he was kept out of the sick-room therefore by

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the pretext that Mrs. Bracey was asleep. By nine o'clock, however, her condition had become so pronounced that the nurse was alarmed, sent for Bracey, and asked him to telephone for the doctor.

No more of the medicine was administered after the dose at half-past six.

At the inquest of course the main question was, how the arsenic could have found its way into the medicine. A number of facts, already discovered by the police, were brought out by the coroner from Dr. Reid. Contrary to the usual practice, he kept white arsenic in his surgery, in a jar on the shelves, not in a poison-cupboard. Why? Because he used to carry out chemical experiments, and as he and his partner did all their own dispensing he had not considered the habit a dangerous one; as for poison-cupboards, nobody used them outside the hospitals. And there was no question of outside interference here because he had made up the medicine with his own hands and was ready to take full responsibility. Was the arsenic jar kept on the top shelf in the surgery, almost exactly above the jar containing the carbonate of magnesia? Certainly it was, why not? Dr. Reid, a middle-aged man, showed signs of approaching irascibility. Somewhat curtly the coroner told him to stand down.

The surgery used by both partners was a ground-floor room in the house occupied by the other, a younger man of the name of Berry. Dr. Berry confirmed Dr. Reid's evidence. No, he had never considered it a dangerous thing to keep white arsenic in the surgery in the circumstances. Yes, they did all their own dispensing. Yes, his sister was learning to dispense, but she had not yet taken it over. No, she had never made up a bottle of medicine for a patient. Yes, Dr. Berry had seen her in the surgery that morning.

Miss Berry, rather frightened, was called. She was a fluttery woman, several years older than her brother. Yes, she was learning to dispense. Yes, she had been in the surgery that morning. But not when that particular bottle was being made up. She was helping the housemaid make the beds at about that time.

Dr. Reid was recalled. Yes, Miss Berry had looked into the surgery that morning. No, she had not been there when he was making up this particular medicine. No, there was no possibility that she had inadvertently handed him the wrong jar, because she had handed him no jars at all, because she was not there; he had taken down the jars he needed himself. No, there was no possibility of a muddle in the prescription. The prescription showed that this had been the only bottle of medicine to be made up that morning.

Was there a chance that he himself had taken down the wrong jar? There was not. Dr. Reid had been in practice long enough not to make fool mistakes like that. Besides, all this talk about the jars was beside the point.

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Evidence had already been given by the official analyst that the medicine did in fact contain all the ingredients which Dr. Reid had put into it; if it were a case of accidental substitution of arsenic for one of them, that one would be missing. Did Dr. Reid then stake his professional reputation on the fact that when that bottle of medicine left his surgery it contained no arsenic? With a full realization of what his answer must imply, Dr. Reid agreed that he did.

The jury however did not agree with Dr. Reid. They found that Mrs. Bracey had died through an overdose of arsenic contained in the medicine made up by Dr. Reid owing to his having taken down the wrong jar from the shelf.

This verdict, imputing to the doctor what amounted to culpable negligence, was tantamount to a verdict of manslaughter against him; but the police made no arrest. It was felt that Dr. Reid's point could not be gainsaid. If arsenic had been accidentally substituted for another ingredient, that ingredient would be lacking; and it was not. The verdict was ignored. Dr. Reid was held to be right in his assertion that when the bottle of medicine left his surgery it contained no arsenic.

The next step in the case was the arrest of Bracey. The reasons for this had not yet been made public, but Moresby had information that at the time of his wife's death Bracey had arsenic in his possession. His own explanation was that he had bought it months earlier, in quantity through the ordinary trade channels for use in some experiments he was making in wood-preservation. In support of this, there was clear evidence both that Bracey had been making such experiments and that he had recently obtained excellent results with certain arsenic compounds. Nevertheless it was equally indisputable that arsenic was in his possession.

As for opportunity, he had been alone with his wife and the medicine bottle for an hour. Only on the question of motive were the police at a loss. If they had been French they would have shrugged their shoulders and said: "*Cherchez la femme.*" Not being French they shrugged their shoulders only, but the shrug carried the cynical implication that marriage itself is a motive for murder.

"I see," Roger nodded, when the Chief Inspector had finished. "After all, they've got logic behind them. We can certainly eliminate an accident on the doctor's part; and so far as opportunity goes, and if nobody else really did enter the bedroom, that narrows it down to Bracey and the nurse. And why the nurse? Anyhow, we must see what we can see. But one thing seems clear, it was done from the inside."

"An inside job," Moresby amended, more professionally.

"I think I'll look into it," said Roger.

There was no difficulty with Bracey's solicitors. Their welcome was almost eager, and they undertook to

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put every possible resource at the disposal of their new ally. In a discussion on the case, however, they were unable to offer any helpful ideas or even to bring forward any new facts of the least importance, though agreeing that the case was narrowed down to those having access to the bedroom between the opening of the bottle and Mrs. Bracey's first symptoms about seven o'clock.

"But of course we mustn't overlook the possibility of some kind of accident on the doctor's part," said Roger thoughtfully, "even if not the particular one suggested at the inquest. Mrs. Bracey was bad earlier in the day, I understand."

That was so, but only in the same way as she had been on previous days. It was impossible to say that these two slight attacks were due to the action of arsenic; not until seven o'clock could arsenic be definitely diagnosed. And there was no possibility of previous administrations; the post-mortem had proved conclusively that the poisoning was acute, and not chronic. Owing to the eliminations it was not possible to state with any accuracy the size of the dose, though the analyst estimated it at about five grains. A test of the medicine showed nine grains of arsenic to the fluid ounce. The dose having been one tablespoon, or half a fluid ounce, this agreed quite well with the theory of a single fatal dose.

"Well, now," asked Roger, "what about the inmates of the house? The nurse, for instance. Nurses have been known to murder their patients just for the fun of the thing. Marie Jeanneret, for instance."

"No doubt, no doubt," agreed the other. "But there is not the slightest evidence of that here. Naturally we have gone closely into her history. She has the reputation of a very respectable woman with a good record; there are no curious incidents connected with her at all."

"A pity," Roger murmured. "It would have been so simple. Well, the servants?"

The servants similarly had been the subjects of close investigation. Not one of them had been in the house for less than five years; they all bore excellent characters; from the butler downwards they were all exceedingly upset at the death of a much-loved mistress, and hardly less so at the predicament of a very popular master; not one of them but was ready to stake everything on the fact of Bracey's innocence.

It was clear too that the solicitor held the same opinion, which Roger thought an excellent sign.

"Well," he said at last, "all I can do is to look round. I think I'd like to see Bracey first of all. That can be arranged, I suppose?"

It could be and it was, on the spot. Within half an hour Roger found himself facing the engineer across a table in the county jail.

Bracey was a large man, with one of those simple red faces which delight publicans and prospective wives. At present his blue eyes wore an ex-

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pression of pathetic bewilderment, like a dog that has been punished for something it did not do.

"Of course I'll help you all I can, Mr. Sheringham," he said, when he had read the note from the solicitor that Roger had brought with him. "And remarkably good it is of you to lend us a hand. I only hope you won't be wasting your time."

"It won't be a waste of my time if I can get you out of here."

"That's what I meant. They can't keep me here long in any case. They only arrested me because they didn't know what to do. I mean, it's too ridiculous. Me poison Cynthia? Why . . . why . . ."

He was so obviously on the point of breaking down, that Roger hurriedly interposed with a question. "What is your own opinion, Mr. Bracey, then?"

"Why, it was an accident. Must have been. Who'd have poisoned her deliberately? She hasn't an enemy in the world. Everyone loved her. It was that fool of a doctor. Made some ghastly mistake, and now he's trying to save his face. Oh, I know they say there couldn't be any mistake, because everything was in the medicine that should have been; but how else can it have happened?"

"We must examine every possibility, nevertheless," Roger said, and went on to ask about the servants.

Bracey was stout in their defense. It was utterly out of the question that any of them could have done such a thing.

Nor was there any other person with a conceivable motive for murder. "I believe the police are nosing round, trying to find out if I haven't been mixed up with some other woman," Bracey said scornfully. "I could have saved them the trouble if they'd asked me. I haven't even looked at another woman since I first met Cynthia."

"No." Roger stroked his chin. This did not seem to be leading anywhere. "Look here, who was your wife's best friend in Marston?"

A wife's best friend knows far more about her than a husband.

"Well, I don't know. She wasn't particularly intimate with anyone. Plenty of friends, but few intimates. I should think she knew Angela Berry as well as anyone."

"That's Dr. Berry's sister, who was called at the inquest?"

"Yes. She used to help Cynthia with the children when they were smaller, before we could afford a nurse. Wouldn't take a penny for it, either. Said she wanted something to do. She and Cynthia got very thick. They haven't seen so much of each other lately perhaps, not since Angela took up helping with the practice; but yes, I should think you might say she was Cynthia's closest friend in Marston."

"I see." Roger mentally noted Angela Berry as a person to whom he could put certain questions about the dead woman which he could not very well put to her husband.

That interview, however, would turn upon motive; opportunity was

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the more urgent matter for investigation. On leaving the prison Roger headed his car for Marston again with the intention of making direct for Silverdene.

The trained nurse was still in residence at the house, in case the police wished to question her further, and Roger, having handed the butler a note from Bracey, asked to see her.

She proved to be a pleasant-faced woman, with greying hair and the usual air of competent assurance of the trained nurse. She answered Roger's questions readily, with a marked Scottish accent. There were only two periods during which the bottle had been out of her observation: during her hour off duty in the afternoon, when she had gone for a short walk, and while Bracey was with his wife. "As if anyone would think o' that puir mon daeing any such thing. A fine mess the pollis have made."

"They seem to think he may have been carrying on with some other woman?" suggested Roger.

"Blether! I ken his kind. It's one woman and one only for that sort. Ay, it's grand husbands they make."

"Then what do you think, nurse?"

There, the nurse admitted, he had her. She did not know what to think. It was mystery to her. She seemed doubtful about the idea of an accident in the surgery; Mrs. Bracey's symptoms, she pointed out, would surely have been much more pronounced had arsenic been present in the medicine from the beginning.

"Then you do think it was murder," Roger persisted.

"Ay," replied the nurse gloomily. "I fear it must have been. Though who could have wanted to murder that puir lamb?"

"And if it is murder, and Mr. Bracey didn't do it, the whole thing boils down to the time while you were out for your walk. Someone must have got into the room then, while Mrs. Bracey presumably was asleep, and put the arsenic in the medicine bottle."

Roger saw the servants, but they could not help him. The butler had been on duty all the afternoon, and had let not a single person into the house. There had been two callers, a Mrs. Ayres and a Miss Jamieson, to ask after Mrs. Bracey, but neither of them had come in. Was there any other way into the house? Well, there were the French windows in the drawing room opening on to the garden. It was just possible, the butler admitted, that someone might have reached them unseen, got inside the house that way, and crept up unobserved to Mrs. Bracey's room.

"Having already watched the nurse leave," Roger added. "But it would be a great risk."

"A very great risk, sir. The person would have to cross the hall and go up the stairs, which as you see are under observation from here right up to the landing, and I was in and out of the hall all afternoon."

"And yet I don't see how else it could have been done," Roger said. He had already dismissed the idea

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that the crime had been committed by someone of the household; apart from any motive, he was satisfied that not one of them was capable of such a thing; it was an outside, not an inside job. "Well, I suppose I'd better have a word with Mrs. Ayres and Miss Jamieson. They might have seen someone. Can you give me their addresses?"

He set off for the interviews.

Mrs. Ayres, an elderly lady with a very precise manner, was anxious to help but unable to do so. She had seen no one, she had noticed nothing unusual, she had just left her flowers and gone.

Without very much hope Roger set out to interview Miss Jamieson. He finally ran her to earth at the local tennis club, and had to wait till she finished a set. She was a large, well-muscled lady and hit a shrewd ball, and Roger was not unthankful to sit in a deck chair for ten minutes and watch her.

On hearing his name and business she exclaimed loudly that precisely the same idea had occurred to herself, as it would have to the police if they had not all been congenital idiots from the Chief Constable down. But alas, there was no evidence that she could produce to support the theory.

"But it was a woman, Mr. Sheringham," she boomed, mopping her red forehead. "Take it from me. The idea of Tom Bracey's so absurd we needn't even consider it. No, it was some woman who fancied she had a grudge against poor Cynthia."

"Arsenic's certainly a woman's weapon," agreed Roger.

"What I say exactly," Miss Jamieson said, nodding violently. "But it's no use asking me who it could have been, because I've racked my brains and racked 'em, and I can't think."

"I thought of asking Miss Berry if she could suggest anyone who might have had a grudge against Mrs. Bracey."

"Yes, I should do that. Angela would know if anyone did."

"By the way," said Roger, "what time was it that you called at Silverdene?"

"I couldn't say to the minute, but not later than ten past three, because I was playing here by a quarter-past."

Roger had an idea. "Could you possibly remember who among Mrs. Bracey's friends was here when you arrived, Miss Jamieson? You must have reached Silverdene only just after the nurse went out, you see; so that anyone who was here before you, and who remained here till four, has a complete alibi for that hour."

Miss Jamieson screwed up her eyes and managed to produce five names, of which only that of Angela Berry was known to Roger. He wrote them carefully down, feeling that he had established something at last, however negative. Angela Berry, too, had stayed at the tennis club till nearly dinner time, so she at all events was eliminated.

Roger's next call was on Dr. Reid, whom he was lucky to find at home. The doctor was indignant over the

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verdict at the inquest, and entirely in agreement with Roger's theories. Mrs. Bracey's death was plain murder: the nurse was out of the question; someone must have got into the house during that fatal hour. But he could not even suggest whom.

"Yes, a nice mess those fools of jurymen have got me into," were his last words. "I've had the police round at the surgery half a dozen times, weighing my stock of arsenic, and comparing it with my poison-book."

"I suppose it tallies?" Roger asked perfunctorily.

"No, it doesn't," the doctor chuckled. "I've actually got more arsenic than my records show, which seems to worry them."

"But how could that happen?"

"Well, obviously I must have bought an ounce once and forgotten to enter it up. As I told them, it's at least eight years since I gave up making my own pills, and I can't profess to remember what happened eight years ago."

"And the jar hasn't been touched since?"

"It hasn't."

As he left Dr. Reid's house and walked down Marston High Street in search of that of Dr. and Miss Berry, Roger found himself more at sea than ever. That he was on the right track, he felt sure; but it seemed a track impossible to retrace. Still, one could only go on trying.

Dr. Berry was out, and the maid seemed very doubtful whether it was possible to see Miss Berry.

Roger produced a card and scribbled a line on it. "Take her this," he said, "and tell her it's very urgent."

The maid returned with the information that Miss Berry would see him.

Angela Berry must have been a plain woman at the best of times; at present her eyes were red-rimmed with crying, and her face ravaged. Her voice was uncertain as she asked her visitor to be seated.

Roger came to the point at once. "I'm sorry to worry you, Miss Berry, but it is literally a case of life and death." He explained briefly his position and ideas, and asked her whether she knew anyone who might have had a grudge against Mrs. Bracey.

Miss Berry hesitated. "N-no. No, I don't."

"Quite sure?"

"Quite," she said, more firmly.

"That's a pity. Well, can you suggest anyone with some other motive for poisoning her? You think Bracey is speaking the truth when he says there was no other woman? He's not shielding anyone? Forgive me; I must speak plainly."

"Certainly not," Miss Berry answered, with a touch of indignation that seemed a little out of place. "Mr. Bracey never . . . there is no question of such a thing. Mr. Bracey is a very honorable man."

"I see. I understand you were Mrs. Bracey's closest friend. Is there nothing at all you can tell me that might help? It's no time for secrets, you know."

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"No, nothing at all, I'm afraid," said Miss Berry. She looked at Roger with eyes that slowly widened. "Mr. Sheringham, he's not in — in *danger*, is he?"

Roger returned her look. He was not satisfied. The woman's manner struck him as just a little evasive. I believe she does know something, he thought, or imagines she does; something discreditable to the wife, I fancy; there was a touch of reserve; but she won't bring it out unless she's frightened; I must frighten her.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Mr. Bracey is undoubtedly in the gravest danger."

"Oh!" It was a little cry. She clasped her hands on her breast. "Mr. Sheringham, I *know* he didn't do it. He couldn't do such a thing. He's the most upright of men. It's terrible, I — isn't there anything I can do? Shall I go to the police and tell them it *was* an accident — that I was handing the jars to Dr. Reid, and must have given him that jar as well as the others? I will if you think it would do any good. I'd do anything. It's too terrible."

"But Dr. Reid has sworn you weren't in the surgery."

"No, I wasn't. But I might be able to persuade him to say that he said that to shield me."

"That might lay you open to a charge of manslaughter," Roger said slowly.

She brushed it aside with scorn. "What does that matter? Anything's better than that Tom — Mr. Bracey should be punished for something he didn't do." She buried her face in her hands. "He — they were my best friends. My only real friends in Marston."

Roger leaned forward. "Miss Berry," he said distinctly, "who did put that arsenic in the medicine bottle?"

She dropped her hands abruptly, staring at him.

"Wh-what did you say?" she asked shakily.

"You think you know, don't you? Please tell me. It's a better way surely of clearing Mr. Bracey by finding the real criminal than by your accusing yourself of all sorts of things you didn't do. Whom have you got in mind?"

She shook her head. "You're mistaken, Mr. Sheringham. I haven't anyone in mind. I — I only wish I had."

Roger stared at her, puzzled. It was true that she was on the verge of hysterics, but even that could not account for the contradictory impression she gave. In spite of the firmness with which she uttered them Roger felt sure that her last words were a lie; she did suspect someone. Then if she were so anxious to clear Bracey, why not give the name?

Hurriedly Roger tried to find a set of circumstances to account for this reluctance. Was it possible that she had been lying all through — lying when she said that Bracey was an honorable man and there was no other woman? Was it possible that there *was* another woman and that Mrs.

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Bracey had confided as much to her friend, that Miss Berry knew who this woman was and suspected her, but that she would not name her, thinking that this should be Bracey's decision and he must be the judge of whether he was to shoulder the responsibility or not? Such a theory postulated a guilty knowledge on the part of Bracey, but that was not impossible.

"I'd like to remind you," said Roger, "that Mr. Bracey is in grave danger."

"He can't be!" she cried, with sudden passion. "It's too preposterous. The police themselves will see that in a day or two. They'll release him. Of course they will. I mean, they *must*."

She believes it too, Roger thought, marking the conviction in her voice. No, I can't frighten her; she's one of the ostrich type; she believes what she wants to believe, and that's all there is to it.

"May I see the surgery?" he asked.

Miss Berry took him through the hall and down a dark passage.

Roger inspected the business-like little surgery with care. At his request Miss Berry pointed out to him the arsenic jar. It was on the top shelf and certainly above the jar of magnesium carbonate, but it was smaller and by no means so directly above the others as the evidence at the inquest had suggested. Even without the presence of magnesia in the medicine, it would have been an almost inconceivable mistake that one jar should have been taken down for the other. On asking, he learned that the relative positions of the jars had not been changed. Any lingering doubts about the possibility of an accident were dispelled.

Roger took Miss Berry back to the drawing room, assuring her that he could see himself out.

The front door leading on to the small front garden was already ajar. As Roger pushed it wider he jumped for his life, for a loud explosion right in his ear nearly blew the hat off his head.

In the garden outside a small boy mocked him ecstatically.

"You jumped! I saw you. I made you jump. Sux!"

Roger regarded the revolting child coldly. The urchin appeared to be about ten years old, and he was excessively dirty even for that.

"Did you make that bang?" he asked.

"It was a booby-trap," replied the small boy with pride. "I knew you'd have to come out when you'd finished with Aunt Angela, so I put up a booby-trap for you. When you opened the door it went off. And you jumped like anything. Sux!"

"I have a way of dealing with unpleasant children who set booby-traps," said Roger, and grasped the infant by the shoulder. "Is there a nice thick stick anywhere around?"

"What for?"

"Because I'm going to beat you."

"You're not," asserted the child with confidence. "No one beats me, not ever. Mummy doesn't let them. Uncle Robert wanted to beat me

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when I stayed here last year, but Aunt Angela wouldn't let him. When I go to school I'm going to one of those where they don't punish you. Mummy says so. She says it's bad for children to be punished. But I shall punish my children when I'm grown up. I shall punish them like billy-o."

At that moment an agitated housemaid arrived round the corner of the house and relieved Roger of his charge. She was apologetic.

"Did he set a trap for you, sir? I'm ever so sorry. He's always doing it. Regular little demon, he is. Seems to like making people jump just for the fun of it."

"I don't," said the child indignantly. "I do it because I'm going to be a doctor like Uncle Robert, and I have to begin studying their ractions."

"A lot you know about such things, I'm sure."

"I do. I know everything. If you jump far enough when a bang goes off, it's a raction, and you have to be cut open for it. You don't know anything, Effie."

"It's thankful we'll all be when he's gone, sir," confided the maid to Roger. "He's a handful. Why, only this morning I caught him in the surgery again. He'd got ever so many bottles down and was pretending to make up the medicines. What the doctor would say, I don't know."

"I wasn't pretending," shouted the outraged urchin. "I was making up real medicine. Doctors have to know about medicines, don't they? And I can go in the surgery whenever I like. Aunt Angela said I can. So sux."

"Well, my prescription," said Roger to the housemaid, "is six across the hinder parts with the whippiest switch you can find. Good-bye."

He went on his way.

As he walked down the road, busy with his thoughts, he became aware that someone was asking him respectfully if he was Mr. Sheringham, and admitted as much.

"Been looking everywhere for you, sir. Mr. Dane, him as is butler at Silverdene, said for me to find you."

"Yes?"

"I'm the gardener, sir, and Mr. Dane was talking to me after you'd gone, and I told him I was working all that afternoon when the mistress died, bedding out the asters. He thought you'd be interested to know."

"It sounds most interesting; though I can't say asters have ever been favorites of mine. Is that all?"

"Well, Mr. Dane thought you'd like to know, seeing you'd spoken to him about the drawing room windows."

"Oh!" Roger's expression changed. "Where were you working then?"

"Why, in the bed up against the house there, just outside the drawing room."

"Were you there from three to four?"

"I was there from two till five, sir. I had to clear it a bit before I could get the plants in."

"Hell!" said Roger.

The whole basis of all his theorizing had gone at a blow.

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He turned on his tracks and made for the High Street again and the office of the solicitor, his mind working furiously. As he reached the threshold he shrugged his shoulders and said aloud: "Well, that *must* be the truth, then."

He asked to see the head of the firm again.

The little elderly solicitor looked up with a wry smile. "Well, Mr. Sheringham? Have you solved our mystery yet?"

"Yes," said Roger, and dropped into a chair.

"What's that? You have, eh? Bless my soul!" He adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses and peered at Roger dubiously.

Roger crossed his legs and gazed with apparently absorbed interest at the toe of his swinging foot. "I have, yes. I must have, because it's the only possible explanation. But I've had to readjust my ideas rather considerably." He recounted the gist of his interviews, and the theory he had based upon them.

"Assuming murder, you see, and taking for granted that the bottle, which had not passed out of Dr. Reid's hands from the time it was filled until it was given to the boy to deliver, was uncontaminated when it reached the sick-room, and relying on my own judgment that none of the inmates of the house was guilty, I was left with only one possible inference — that the arsenic was inserted during the nurse's absence from three till four by someone from outside entering the house through the French windows in the drawing room, the only apparently unguarded way in. But now we have the gardener's evidence that no one could have entered that way, and so we have to start again from the beginning."

"Yes, yes," nodded the other. "I quite see that."

"So having already proved that only during that period and in that way could the arsenic have been put into the bottle after it arrived at the house, we are obviously forced to the conclusion that it was *not* put in after it arrived at the house. In other words, it was already there."

"God bless my soul! Then Dr. Reid *did* . . ."

"On the other hand we have Dr. Reid's positive assurance that he didn't and couldn't have: which I accept. Therefore it was introduced not by Dr. Reid but by somebody else."

"But I understand that the police are convinced the arsenic must have been inserted after the medicine reached the house, because the first two doses produced no symptoms of poisoning."

"I think we can explain that. No, the real point of the case seems to me the fact that the medicine contained all the proper ingredients, plus the arsenic. You may say that this proves that the arsenic must have been inserted later, but does it?"

Roger thought for a moment. "As to the first two doses not producing symptoms, a very simple explanation

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would be that the nurse didn't shake the bottle. Arsenic isn't readily soluble in water, and there couldn't have been a great deal in the medicine. It's a heavy powder, and it sank to the bottom, leaving only enough at the top of the bottle to produce mild discomfort. For the third dose the nurse obviously did shake the bottle."

"Yes, yes," approved the little solicitor. "That is a sound point, without doubt. Perhaps the nurse may remember."

"She may, but I doubt it."

"But who put the arsenic in the bottle? That is our real puzzle after all."

"I think," said Roger, choosing his words, "that I know who caused the arsenic to be put into the bottle. And how it was done. But I can't prove it. At this stage the responsible person would certainly deny it. I think . . . yes, I think I'll take a chance. May I borrow your telephone?"

He ruffled the pages of the local directory, and called a number.

"Marston 693? I want to speak to Miss Berry, please. It's urgent. Please tell her it's Mr. Sheringham." He waited.

"But what are you going to do?" asked the solicitor.

"Prove my case," said Roger shortly. "It's the only possible way. — Hullo! Yes? Is that Miss Berry? Listen, Miss Berry, please. You remember telling me that you'd do anything to clear Mr. Bracey? Well I'm ringing up to advise you what you can do. Just write out the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and post it to the police. Yes, I think you understand. I mean, how the arsenic got into the medicine. No, I know exactly; and in two hours' time I'm going to give my knowledge to the police. No, not for two hours. Let me show you that I really do know by telling you this: the mag. carb. pond. jar was washed out and refilled from the stock cupboard, to make sure that no traces remained. Isn't that so? I'm sure you understand. Put it all in your letter to the police, every detail. Otherwise Bracey will hang. Goodbye."

He hung up the receiver.

"What is all this, Mr. Sheringham? What is all this?"

Roger looked at him. "Did you know that Miss Berry is hopelessly in love with Bracey?" he said abruptly. "She is. And she's just the sort of person to believe just what she would like to believe. In this case she found no difficulty in believing that if Bracey hadn't a wife already, he would marry her. So that's why she took advantage of Mrs. Bracey's gastro-enteritis *to slip a couple of pinches of arsenic into the top of the mag. carb. pond. jar!* The powders are much alike, you see, and so are the symptoms. She saw from the prescription book that there was no other medicine that morning requiring mag. carb. pond.; so if she emptied the jar as soon as Dr. Reid had gone out, washed it clean, and refilled it, she would run no risk of poisoning anyone else. Ingenious, wasn't it?"

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"Well, upon my word . . . but what did she say?"

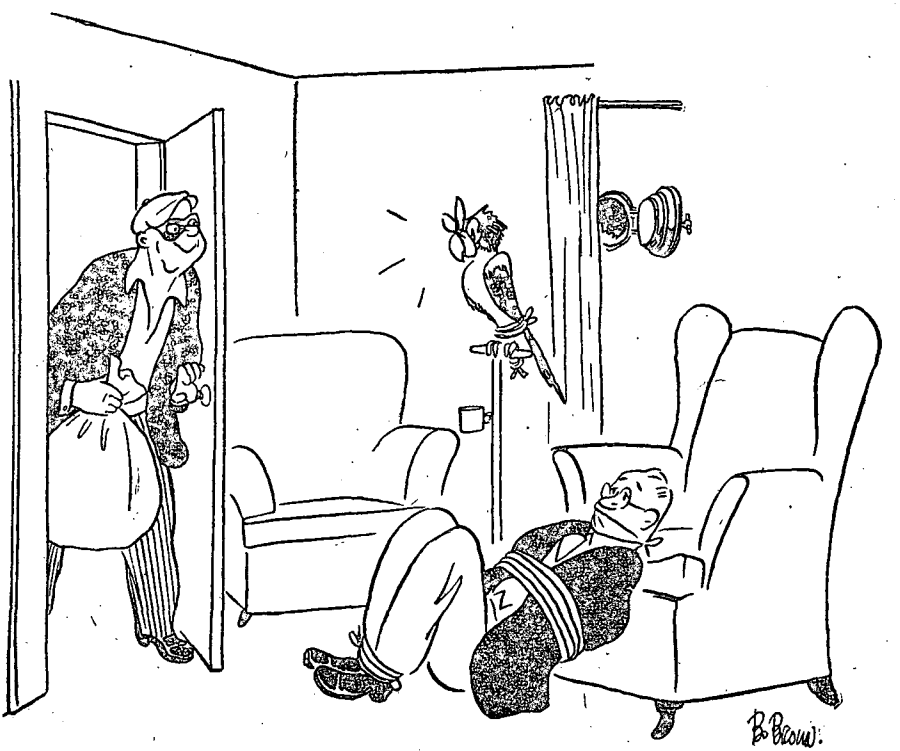
"Nothing. But I think she'll do it."

"But you shouldn't have warned her," squeaked the little solicitor. "It was most improper. You should have laid the theory before the proper authorities. I don't know what to do at all."

"Why, let her have her chance. If she doesn't take it, that's her affair. But let her have it. Though she's not really a very nice person. She had a second line of defense all prepared in the shape of a loathsome nephew, whom she's obviously been encouraging to go into the surgery and play with the drugs. Very cunning. Too cunning. But let her have her chance."

"Her chance? I don't understand. What chance?"

"I notice," said Roger drily, "that contrary to all the rules Dr. Reid doesn't keep his poisons under lock and key."



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THE IDES OF MICHAEL MAGOON

by ELLERY QUEEN

IT WAS PASSED in the third session of the 65th Congress and approved as of 6:55 p.m. on the twenty-fourth of February, 1919, and its title is Public — No. 254 [H.R. 12863].

Nor is there anything alarming in its subtitle, which happens to be *An Act To provide revenue, and for other purposes.* The fifth word may raise a few scattered goose pimples, but hardly more.

It is necessary to read on.

Nothing will be clear until you come upon the phrase, "on or before the fifteenth day of March."

Then everything will be clear, clear as the clap of the tocsin. There is only one calamity which befalls America, *urbs et suburbs*, on or before the fifteenth day of March, and that is the income tax.

Before going on to Michael Magoon and his unusual tax problem, it is tempting to take a short detour into the statutes, which concern not Mike alone but very nearly all of us. There was income-tax legislation before the Revenue Act of 1918, and there has been income-tax legislation since, but Public — No. 254 [H.R. 12863] bears a curious distinction. It was the first income-tax law which pronounced the annual Judgment Day to be March the fifteenth. Its predecessors designated March the first.

Why the change in dates?

There is a reason, of course, and it is not the reason your tax expert, for all his awful knowledge, can give you.

Someone — perhaps it was Mr. Secretary of the Treasury, or a Gentleman from Indiana or Ohio, or even some lowlier lackey of the People with a finger in the legislative pie — someone with a frightening lack of humor remembered great Caesar and the bloody daggers. Someone remembered the signs and the portents and the gathering crimson thunderheads over the full Capitoline moon. He may even have recalled that *postridie idus.*, the day following the Ides, was held by the ancient Romans to be unlucky.

And who among us, after rendering unto Caesar, will deny on any given March the sixteenth that the Romans were right?

The whole thing was certainly unlucky for Magoon.

Mike was what the fancy boys like to call a private "op," or "eye." These fascinating terms inevitably materialize a slim-hipped, narrow-eyed, cigaret-dragging character in a Finchley custom-drape, a Sulka tie, and a $35 Dobbs, who is greased death on the draw, kills five thugs and one mastermind on every case, is as irresistible with dames as a fox in a hen-coop, carries a self-refillable flask of Scottish dew on the other hip, and speaks, when he speaks at all, in insolent monosyllables — something

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out of Chandler by Bogart.

Alas. Mike Magoon was a sagging 63 with a 48 waist, very large flat feet, and blinky brown eyes covered by tortoiseshell glasses, which gave him an air of groping astonishment. He wore Adam hats, suits from Barney's, and shoes by W. L. Douglas. And he neither smoked nor drank — asthma barred the one and, as for the other, his good wife had the nasal infallibility of a beagle. He had never manhandled a lady client in his life; not that he lacked a libido, but he cherished his license more. And in the sudden-death department, he had discharged his Police Positive exactly twice since resigning from the Force four years before, and one of those times he was cleaning his pistol on the fire escape when a neighbor's pride and joy whanged his shooting hand with a well-directed B.B. shot.

No cases came Mike's way involving mysterious fat men with inscrutable eyes, or Maltese falcons, or gangster chieftains in luxurious penthouses. For the most part he spent his time trailing thirtyish ladies for suspicious husbands or putting the grab on shop clerks allergic to the boss's till. On those Saturday nights when he was not working, he took his wife to the movies. On Sundays, after church, there was always The Little Ukraine on Fordham Road — Mike was mad about *shashlik* and *borscht* with sour cream. And on Wednesday nights, bingo.

The first three years Mike was a private eye he operated out of his three-room Bronx flat to cut the overhead, picking up what cases he could through tips from old friends in brass buttons. Then he and Mrs. Magoon decided that a front and a midtown telephone number might pay for more bingo games, so Mike sublet one room of a four-office suite in a 42nd Street office building, sharing the premises with a public stenographer, a commercial artist, and a little bald man with a gold tooth who had four phones which were always ringing. A week after *Michael Magoon, Confidential Investigations* had sprouted in gilt on his pebbled-glass door, Mike opened it to admit Mrs. Clementa Van Dome, the kind of client the Magoons of this world lie awake nights praying for: the client who pays an annual retainer for continuous services rendered. It was a klep case in which — but more of Mrs. Van Dome anon.

Three times since that gold-letter day the Ides of Martius came and went, and Caesar was satisfied. And then came the fourth time.

The fourth time it was Mike who went, hurrying as fast as his asthma and flat feet would permit, to the Queen apartment.

A detective consulting a detective struck Nikki's funnybone. And poor Mike's manner as he looked around at the Queen walls somehow made it even funnier.

But the best was still to come.

"Ellery," said Mike, blushing, "I have been robbed."

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"Robbed," said Ellery with a straight face. "Robbed of what, Mike?"

"My income tax return."

Nikki excused herself heroically. When she came back, Ellery was putting his handkerchief away.

"Forgive me, Mike," he was saying. "My old pleurisy. Did you say your tax return has been stolen?"

"That's what I said, and you're healthy as a horse," said Mike Magoon doggedly. "Oh, I don't blame you for goin' into hysterics. But it ain't funny, McGee. Today's the fourteenth of March. How am I gonna make the March fifteenth deadline?"

"Well, your — hrm! — return can't be terribly complicated, Michael," said Ellery gravely. "Get another blank and fill it in, and so on."

"With what, I ask you!"

"With what?"

"You gotta have data!"

"Well, certainly. Don't you have data?"

"No!"

"But — "

"Listen, Ellery. All my papers and records — everything I was usin' to make out my return — it's *all* been swiped!"

"Oh."

"It was in this brief case, the whole business. It'd take me weeks to round up duplicates of my records! Meanwhile what do I say to the Collector of Internal Revenue?" And Mike, because he was an old stable-mate of Inspector Queen's and had known Ellery when he was a cigar in the Inspector's pocket, added: "Wise guy?"

"Ellery, that *is* a nuisance," said Nikki, glancing over at the table to make sure that her own records and return were still there.

"Records and all . . . Where were the contents of your brief case stolen from, Mike?"

"My office. You been up there, Ellery — you know there's three other tenants —"

"And you all use a common reception room," Ellery nodded. "Were you in your office at the time, Mike?"

"Yes. Well, no — not exactly. Look. I better tell you the whole thing, just the way it happened. It's got me loopin'."

It had happened around six p.m. the previous day. Mike had been working on his tax return. Just before six he had decided to give up the struggle for the day. He had collected his cancelled checks, memoranda, receipted bills and so on and had put them, together with his return, into his brief case.

"I'd just put on my overcoat," said Mike, "when Mrs. Carson — she's the public steno who leases the suite and rents out the offices — Mrs. Carson comes runnin' into my office yellin' there's a fire in the reception room. So I run out there and, sure enough, the settee's on fire. Somebody'd dropped a match into a waste-paper basket right next to it, and it blazed up and the settee caught fire. Well, it wasn't much — I put it out

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in five minutes — then I go back to my office, pick up my hat and brief case, and amble on home."

"And, of course," sighed Ellery, "when you got home you opened your brief case and your return and records were gone."

"With the wind," said Michael Magoon bitterly. "Cleaned out and a newspaper stuffed inside instead."

"Could the transfer have been made, Mike, en route from your office to your home?"

"Impossible. I walked over from the office to the garage where I park my car, with the brief case under my arm. Then I drove home, the case next to me on the car seat."

"You're sure this is the same brief case?"

"Oh, sure. It's an old one. It's my case, all right."

"Then it wasn't a wholesale substitution," said Ellery thoughtfully. "Someone opened your case on your office desk, removed its contents, substituted a newspaper, and closed the case again, all while you were putting out the fire in the reception room."

"It must have been that Mrs. Carson," said Nikki, wondering how the obvious could have escaped even such a pedestrian sleuth as Mike Magoon.

"How about it, Mike?" asked Ellery.

"Not a chance. She ran out in front of me and stayed with me in the reception room, runnin' back and forth from the water-cooler to the settee with a vase she keeps on her desk. Didn't leave my sight for a second."

"Who else was in the suite, Mike?"

"The two other tenants. One of 'em's a commercial artist named Vince, Leonardo Vince, a screwball if I ever saw one. The other's a little crumb calls himself Ziggy, Jack Ziggy. He thinks I don't know it, but he's a bookie."

"Didn't Vince and Ziggy run out of their offices when you and Mrs. Carson tackled the fire?"

"Sure. But they didn't help put it out — just stood around givin' advice. I didn't pay any attention to either of 'em."

"Then it's possible one of *them* —?"

"It's possible. But I can't be sure. Anyway, I drove right back down to the office again last night, thinkin' maybe I'd left my tax stuff on my desk or somethin' —"

"But of course it wasn't there."

"I didn't sleep last night," said Mike miserably, "and if I could have slept, the old lady's jawin' would have kept me awake."

"Have you been to the office this morning, Mike?"

"No. I came right down here, Ellery."

"Well." Ellery rose and began to fill his pipe. "A very unusual problem, Mike."

"Huh?"

"Unusual!" said Nikki. "All right, Mr. Queen, I'll bite. What's unusual about it?"

"Why should someone steal a man's income-tax return — the return of a

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man like Mike? To find out what Mike's income was last year? With all respect to your industry, Michael, that could hardly interest anyone; and more to the point, if that was what the thief was after, he wouldn't have to *steal* the return — a quick look would tell him what he wanted to know."

"Then why," asked Nikki, "did he steal it?"

"That," replied Ellery, "is what makes the problem interesting. Mike." He eyed Mike sternly. "Have you been up to anything illegal?"

"Illegal!"

Ellery chuckled. "Routine question, Michael. Of course, if you were finagling, you'd hardly report it to Uncle Sam. No." Ellery puffed on his pipe. "The only thing that makes sense is the source of your income."

"I don't get it," complained the eye.

"Now, now. After all, Mike you're a private dick. Your own shingle advertises the confidential nature of your work. Tell me: Which paper or papers in your brief case referred to a client or case in which *secrecy* is of the essence?"

Mike looked doubtful. "Well, all my cases are what you might call confidential —"

"Mike, I'm willing to bet your tax against mine that you have at least one client who's extremely wealthy, who came to you under a pledge of absolute secrecy . . . and whose records, or a record of whose case, were in your brief case yesterday."

"Mrs. Van Dome," said Magoon, gaping.

"Mrs. Van Dome," said Ellery briskly. "Sounds as if I've hit the jack-pot, Mike. Nikki — notes!"

And Michael Magoon told the story of his very best client, Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome.

Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome, had she been either a Van Swicken or a Van Dome, would have occupied a position of high altitude on the social pyramid. Being both a Van Swicken and a Van Dome, she reigned alone at the very apex, surrounded by the stratosphere and God. She was so far out of sight of mere earthlings that Nikki, who was Ellery's Almanach de Gotha, had never heard of her, whereas Ellery had. She considered Park Avenue gauche, and the D.A.R. upstarts. A Van Swicken had helped build Fort Amsterdam in ye Manhatas, and a Van Dome had led the trek to Gowanus Bay nine years before he became restless and moved on to establish a settlement which was named Breuckelen. The measure of Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome's social standing was that she was invited to all the most exclusive functions in New York and never went to any. She herself gave one party each year; her guest-list was more carefully scrutinized than the personnel at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and only those were invited whose forefathers had settled in the New World before 1651.

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and whose fortunes had not been tainted by trade for at least six generations.

Mrs. Van Dome was a widow, and she had one child, a daughter.

"You ought to see this Margreta," said Mike Magoon. "Skinny as a pretzel-stick, pimples all over her map, forty-five if she's a day, and she's a poetess."

"A what?" said Nikki.

"She writes poetry," said Mike firmly.

"Under the name of Hollandia," nodded Ellery. "Brutal stuff. I take it, Mike, mama consulted you about Margreta?"

"That's it."

"Just because she writes bad poetry?" said Nikki.

"Because she's a klep, Miss Porter."

Nikki looked excited. "What's that? It sounds —"

"Relax, Nikki," said Ellery. "Mike means a kleptomaniac. It all begins to be too, too clear, Michael. Stop me if I'm wrong. If there's one thing Mrs. Van Dome fears, it's scandal. The unlovely Margreta does not merely commit the crime of writing bad poetry, she also develops a yearning to take things belonging to other people. There have been polite complaints, perhaps, discreetly made to mama. Mama pays, but begins to worry. Margreta shows no signs of reform. The habit grows. It will soon be in the papers. Mama comes to a relatively unknown private detective — no doubt after checking your personal reputation, Mike, with your old pals at Headquarters — and puts Margreta into your hands on a one-hundred-percent hush-hush basis."

"That's it, that's it," said Mike. "My job is to protect Margreta from arrest and publicity. I trail her whenever she hits the street. When I see her take somethin', I quietly pay for it after she drifts on. Mrs. Van Dome gives me an expense account — which, believe me, she looks over with an eagle eye! I get an annual retainer — not a heck of a lot, but it's good steady dough."

"And among your income tax records," nodded Ellery, "were the various accounts, receipted bills, *et cetera*, pertaining to the misadventures of Margreta."

"Somebody," cried Nikki, "trailed Mr. Magoon or something, saw what was going on, then stole his income-tax records to . . ." Nikki stopped. "To what?"

"To make use of them," said Ellery dryly. "Obviously."

"*Blackmail!*" roared Mike, jumping up as if he had just been given the hot-foot. "By cripes, Ellery, with those receipted bills, and correspondence, and stuff — whoever it was could blackmail old lady Van Dome till she was . . . was black in the face! She'd pay anything to keep that yarn from gettin' out! That's it!"

"Somebody," said Nikki. "Who's somebody?"

Mike sat down.

But Ellery, knocking his pipe out on the fire screen, said: "Mrs. Carson."

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"Mrs. Carson?" said Mike, blinking.

"But Ellery, Mr. Magoon says she couldn't possibly —"

"Nikki. A fire starts in a wastebasket which ignites an office settee which sends Mrs. Carson running into Mike's office yelling for him to . . . what? Run out — with her. Mike does so. And Mrs. Carson sticks with him." Ellery shrugged. "By the same token, Mike sticks with Mrs. Carson . . . while Mrs. Carson's accomplice slips into Mike's office and, having no time to winnow the Van Dome papers from the rest, lifts the entire contents of Mike's brief case, puts a newspaper stuffing in their place, and slips out. Mike," said Ellery, setting his pipe into the mantel-piece rack, "let's go down to your office and give that public stenographer a little dictation."

So collector of Internal Revenue v. Magoon was a simple business after all.

Only, it wasn't.

When they opened Mrs. Carson's door they found Mrs. Carson taking dictation from a higher Authority.

"Feeling better now?" asked Ellery, drinking the rest of the bourbon in the paper cup.

"Oh, Ellery," moaned Nikki. "That dead woman."

"Is a dead woman."

"But a dead woman without a face!"

"I should think you'd be used to that sort of thing by now, Nikki."

"I suppose that's why you finished my drink."

"I was thirsty," said Ellery with dignity; and he strolled through Mrs. Carson's doorway waging a heroic battle with his stomach.

They were standing around the typewriter desk staring down at Mrs. Carson's ruins. Nobody was saying anything.

"Oh, Ellery."

"Dad."

"Six inches," said Inspector Queen in a wondering voice. "The rod was fired not more than six inches from her pan."

"There's no question but that it's Mrs. Carson?"

"It's her, all right." Mike was slugging it out, too.

"Mrs.," said Ellery, looking at her left hand. "Where's Mr.?"

"In Montefiore Cemetery," said Mike, still swallowing powerfully. "He kicked off six years ago, she told me."

"How old was she, Mike?" Funny how hard it was to tell a woman's age when her face was not there for reference.

"I'd have said around thirty-six, thirty-eight."

"Ever mention a boy friend?" asked the Inspector.

"Nope. And she never seemed to have a date, Inspector. Always workin' in here late."

"Michael, Michael," said Inspector Queen. "That's *why* she worked in here late. Only she wasn't working.

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Not at a typewriter, anyway."

Through the greenish overcast, Mike looked puzzled.

The old gentleman said impatiently: "We know she decoyed you with that fire she set herself; we know somebody lifted the Van Dome stuff from your brief case during the fire. And who was here at the time? The other two tenants. So one of *them* was the Carson woman's accomplice. Does it fit? Sure, Mike. When she was 'working late,' she was playing hoopla with either Leonardo Vince or Jack Ziggy right here in the office."

"But then," muttered Mike Magoon, "who plugged her last night? You mean Vince, or Ziggy . . . ?"

The Inspector nodded.

"But why, Inspector!"

"Michael, Michael."

"The double-cross, dad?" asked Ellery, not skeptically — just asking.

"What else? She helps him swipe the documents he can blackmail Mrs. Van Dome with, so then he rubs the girl friend out. He's got it all to himself, and no blabbermouth to worry about besides. Ellery, why you looking as if you smell something?"

"He must be very stupid," said Ellery.

"Sure," said his father cheerfully. "They're only smart in the fairy tales you write. Now if this were one of your mystery plots, Ellery, you know who'd be the criminal?"

"Mike," said Ellery.

"*Me!*" Mike immediately looked guilty.

"Sure, Mike," chuckled the Inspector. "By the way, what time was it when you got back here last night? Your return trip, Mike — when you came back to see if you'd left your papers behind?"

"So that's it," growled Mike. "Listen here, Inspector . . . !"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Mike," said Ellery irritably. "What time was it? Was she alive? Was her light on? What?"

"Oh. Yeah, sure. Must have been a quarter of eight or so. She was workin' in her office here. I says Mrs. Carson did you find any papers of mine around from my brief case and she says no Mr. Magoon I didn't. I says where's Ziggy and that nut artist and she says oh they went home long ago. So I says goodnight and goes back home myself."

"How did she seem to you at the time, Mike?"

"Okay."

"Not nervous?"

"Hell, I don't know. She was always nervous."

"Well." The Inspector scratched his head. "The best Doc Prouty can give us is that she was killed between seven and nine last night. The cleaning woman's no help — she was through giving the offices a lick and a promise by seven o'clock, she says, and she says Mrs. Carson was here alone. So, Mike, if you left her alive near eight, then she was bopped between eight and nine."

"By one of these two characters," said Sergeant Velie from the doorway.

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The first man was a tall, frayed, decaying-looking fellow with prehensile dirty fingers and half-slices of lemon under his eyes. The second was a little bald-headed man with a very gold tooth. Their eyes bugged at the thing lolling on the typewriter and they both back-pedaled fast. But Sergeant Velie was leaning in the doorway, licking a cigar.

The tall man went over to the window and opened it and stuck his face out into the cold March airstream. The small man went over to Mrs. Carson's waste-basket and bent over, almost embracing it.

"How can you stand it? How can you stand it?" the tall man kept saying.

"Arrrgh," said the little man.

"That's Vince the artist," said Mike. "That's Jack Ziggy the bookie," said Mike.

"I didn't kill her," said the tall man. "I'm an artist. I'm interested in life. I couldn't kill a spider crawling up my leg. Ask anybody. Don't think you'll make me say I did it. Cut pieces out of me —" Leonardo Vince was getting worked up, blood in his musty face again.

"You've made your point, Vince," said the Inspector mildly. "I suppose, Ziggy, you didn't kill her either."

The little bald man raised his head to reply, but then he stooped quickly again and repeated: "Arrrgh."

Sergeant Velie drawled: "Inspector."

"Huh?" The old gentleman did not glance at him.

"The night man here says Vince and Ziggy both came back to the buildin' last night. He can't remember the exact times but he says they came separate, and they came between eight and nine."

Mrs. Carson was a pall, definitely. Even Sergeant Velie sucked on his cigar with more enjoyment when she floated out of the office between two Welfare men.

Leonardo Vince shut the window, shivering, and the little bookmaker straightened up with the waste-basket, glancing around apologetically. The Inspector nodded to a detective and Jack Ziggy went out holding the basket high and wide.

"Cobalt blue," said the Inspector to the artist. "You were saying . . . ?"

"You can't make it out red or ochre or any damned thing but what I say it was," said Vince wearily. "It was cobalt blue. Go into my office and see if you can find the tube. You can't. It's not there. I took it home last night. That's why I came back. I may serve commerce during the day, and damn the shriveled souls of all agency men! — but my nights are dedicated to Art, gentlemen, with a capital and profitless A. I got home, had a bite, went to my easel, and found I had no cobalt blue which I happened to need for a purpose which would be far above your vulgar understanding. The supply stores were closed. I returned to the office here for a tube of —"

"Cobalt blue," said the Inspector,

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nodding. He stared at Vince hard. Vince stared back, with hate. "And Mrs. Carson was —?"

"Am I supposed to contradict myself?" asked the artist bitterly. "But how could I? A child could repeat this story *ad infinitum*. I didn't even see Mrs. Carson. There was a light on in her office but the door was shut. Don't bother to ask the next question. It was about eight-fifteen. No, the homunculus wasn't here — I refer to the creature who calls himself Ziggy — at least, I didn't see him. And I have no idea if the woman was alive or dead; I heard not a whisper from her office. And lastly, I am a woman-hater. Now what do I do — say it all over again?"

On the heels of this remarkable soliloquy came the homunculus, with the detective but without the waste-basket.

"And me," whined Ziggy, "me, I don't know —"

"Nuttin."

" — nuttin. But from nuttin."

"You had a couple of parties to ring up," prompted Inspector Queen politely, "and —?"

"Yeah. Private calls, see? Confidentially, some of my clients owe me some back dough and they been tryin' to sucker me, so I come back at eight-thirty to use my own phone, see? More private, like. And I don't remember a thing, not a thing. No light, no Mrs. Carson, no nuttin. I don't remember nuttin. I don't see nobody, I don't hear nobody —"

"Oh, hell," said the Inspector. "Ellery, have you got anything?"

"I see no reason," said Ellery absently, "to hold these two men any longer."

His father frowned.

"You've established no connection between these fellows and Mrs. Carson, beyond a common tenancy. The woman was obviously killed by someone else. Get them out of here, Dad — I'm sicker of them than you are."

When Leonardo Vince and Jack Ziggy were gone, the old gentleman said: "All right, Master Mind. What's the great big plot?"

"And why'd you warn us not to say anything about Mike's income tax stuff on Mrs. Van Dome bein' swiped?" demanded Sergeant Velie.

"Suppose," said Ellery, "suppose thief-killer-potential-blackmailer is in desperate need of ready cash." He looked at them.

"He wouldn't dare," breathed his father. "Not *now*."

"Maestro, he's hot!"

"He doesn't know we've made the least connection between the theft of Mike's records and the murder of Mrs. Carson."

Inspector Queen trotted around the office, pulling at his mustache.

Then he stopped and said: "Mike, phone that Mrs. Van Dome. I want to talk to her."

The next morning, when Ellery hung up, he said to his audience: "It's a curious experience, speaking to Mrs. Van Dome. Didn't you find it so yesterday, dad?"

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"Never mind how I found that snooty, upstaging, cop-hating old battle-ax," grunted the Inspector. "What did she just say, Ellery?"

"Like a dream-trip through outer space. It leaves you with an exhilarating memory of indescribable grandeurs and only the vaguest sense of reality. Mike, does she really exist?"

"Never mind the fancy stuff," growled Magoon. "What did she *say*?"

"She received the note in the first mail this morning."

"Really, Ellery," said Nikki, "your omniscience is disgusting."

"I better ankle over there," said Sergeant Velie, "see Her Nibs, get the note, and arrange for —"

"You will not be received," said Ellery dreamily. "Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome has just passed a Law. It is to the effect that if she wants to pay blackmail, she'll pay blackmail, and if the City of New York sends so much as one policeman or detective to the rendezvous, she'll sue said City for a large number of millions."

"You mean —" cried the Inspector.

"She's afraid that you'd scare off the blackmailer, dad. Then he'd give the full and documented story of Margreta's little vice to the newspapers. To prevent that, she's ready to pay ten thousand dollars, and so on. She was quite nasty about it in an imperial sort of way."

"So our hands are tied," groaned the Inspector. "If only we knew what was in that note!"

"Oh, that. I have it here on my pad, word for word."

"She *read* it to you?"

"It seems that I," said Ellery, "am a gentleman — of a lower order, to be sure — but still . . . Oh, you heard my line. Here's the note: 'Mrs. Van Dome. I have the proof your daughter is a crook. Be in the south Waiting Room at Penn Station at eight p.m. tonight. Bring ten thousand dollars in nothing bigger than twenties. Wear a black hat with a purple nose-veil. Wrap the dough in red paper, hold it under your left arm. Don't tell police. If there's any sign of gumshoes or cops tonight I'll see to it every paper in town gets the lowdown — with photostats — on how your daughter's been lifting stuff from New York department stores for years. Be smart. Play ball. I mean business.' No signature."

"It sounds like that gold-tooth man," said Nikki, but doubtfully.

"I think it's Vince," said Mike excitedly.

"Might be either," grunted the Inspector. "Ziggy being extra-careful about his English, or Vince being purposely sloppy. Good work, son. We'll be there and —"

"Oh, no, you won't."

"You think I won't?"

"City. Suit."

His father ground the inspectorial jaws.

"Besides," said Ellery, "I gave Mrs. Van D. my word as a gentleman that no policeman or city detective would be at the rendezvous tonight."

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"Ellery," groaned his father.

"On the other hand, I'm not a policeman or city detective, am I? Nor is Mike. And certainly Nikki isn't."

"Ellery!"

"Mike, you don't look pleased."

"Pleased! Today is March the fifteenth," said Mike through his teeth, "the rat won't show till eight p.m. — the deadline for income-tax returns is midnight — and he says I don't look pleased."

"Why, Michael," said Ellery soothingly. "That gives us all of four hours."

"To collar this skunk, find out where he's hid my tax stuff, get 'em, finish workin' out my return, and have it in the mail — all between eight and twelve!"

"Cinch," said Ellery. "Michael, my boy, it's as good as in the bag — the mail bag — right now."

Prophecy is a perilous art.

At twelve minutes of eight o'clock on the evening of March fifteenth a large stout woman wearing a black hat and a purple nose-veil, carrying a fat parcel wrapped in red paper under her left arm, appeared suddenly in the entrance to the south Waiting Room at Pennsylvania Station.

Mrs. Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome surveyed her fellow-Americans. There was an expression of excitement on those remote features. So these were the People, it said. One gathered that this was at least as great an adventure.

The People stared back, rather uneasily. The steamfitter jaw bunched, and Mrs. Van Dome swept regally to the nearest bench. A Negro soldier moved over to make room for her. On the other side a young mother was struggling to diaper a kicking, screaming infant. Mrs. Van Dome was seen to take a long, deep breath. Then she sat down, and she sat rigidly. She grew red in the face.

She was trying not to breathe.

At twelve minutes of ten she was still seated there. By now her neighbors were an old man without a tie who was carrying a paper bag, and a girl in a mink coat and no hat who was smoking a cigaret.

The three watchers crossed glances over their newspapers.

"All this excitement," muttered Nikki, "is killing me — " she stirred tenderly "— and you know where."

"He couldn't have spotted us," mumbled Mike. "Ellery, he couldn't have."

"It's unlikely," said Ellery. "Unless he was here at six o'clock and saw us enter the Station. If he wasn't, it's even unlikelier because, from where we're sitting, we're invisible unless you come *into* the Waiting Room, or at least stand in the entrance. That's why I picked this spot."

"But then we'd have seen *him*," winced Nikki.

"Exactly." Ellery rose. "We've either been gulled, or he got cold feet at the last moment."

"But what about Mrs. Van Dome?" asked Nikki.

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"Let her stay here inhaling the odors of America," said Ellery. "Do her good. Come on."

"My income tax," groaned Mike Magoon.

And the first people they saw when they entered Inspector Queen's anteroom at Police Headquarters were Leonardo Vince and Jack Ziggy.

"Ellery —" cried Nikki; but then she saw the Inspector's face, and she stopped.

"Ah, here's a man who'll be interested in your yarn, Mr. Vince," said the Inspector genially. "Ellery, guess what. — Oh, by the way, son. Did you have a good dinner?"

"Disappointing."

"You can't always tell from those fancy menus, can you? As I was saying. At seven-thirty this evening Mr. Vince marches into Headquarters here. Mr. Vince, tell my son what you told me."

"I was home, painting," said Leonardo Vince wearily. "About a quarter of seven my phone rang. It was Western Union. They read me a telegram. It said: 'Want to commission daughter's portrait. Am leaving town tonight but will have few minutes discuss it with you before train time. Meet me eight tonight south Waiting Room Penn Station. Will be wearing black hat and purple nose-veil and carrying red parcel.' "

"Signed," said Inspector Queen, "'Clementa Van Swicken Van Dome.' "

"Have you — ?" began Ellery.

"Sure, Maestro," said Sergeant Velie. "That's the copy I myself got from the telegraph office this evenin' when I checked. The message was phoned in to a midtown station in the middle of the afternoon. They can't tell us who phoned it in. They had instructions to deliver the wire to the addressee at a quarter of seven tonight."

Then Ellery turned to the artist and asked pleasantly: "Well why didn't you keep the appointment, Mr. Vince?"

The artist bared his woody-looking teeth. "Oh, no," he grinned. "Not little Leonardo. You develop an animal instinct for danger when you've been hunted in this world as long as I have. Riches descend on me the very same day I become a suspect in a murder case? Ha, ha! I came straight to Inspector Queen."

"And he's been here," said Inspector Queen dryly, "ever since."

"Can't get him out of the office," complained the Sergeant.

"It's such a nice, safe office," said Leonardo Vince.

"And Mr. Jack Ziggy?" asked Ellery suddenly.

The little bookmaker started. Then he said: "It's a frame. I don't know —"

"Nuttin," said the Inspector. "Mr. Jack Ziggy, Ellery, was picked up at seven-thirty this evening in a routine raid on a big bookie joint on 34th Street and Eighth Avenue."

"When the boys found out who they had," said Velie, "they brought him right here." He looked baleful.

"Where he's been keeping Mr.

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Vince company. Velie, stay here and entertain these gentlemen. We're going into my office."

"My income tax," muttered Mike Magoon.

"The way I see it," said the Inspector comfortably, putting his feet up on his desk, "is that this is pretty smart stuff. Vince is our baby. He's a cutie. He knows we've connected the theft and the murder. Or he suspects we have, maybe because we haven't handled Mike as a suspect, too. He decides to play it safe."

"Sends that letter to Mrs. Van Dome," said Nikki, "making the appointment at Penn Station — then today he wires *himself* to keep it!"

"And, of course, promptly comes hotfooting it down to me with it instead," nodded the Inspector. "Effect? He's an innocent man being framed for theft, intended extortion, murder — the book."

"But then," protested Mike, "how's he ever figure to blackmail Mrs. Van Dome? I thought that was the whole idea!"

"I said he's a cutie, Mike," replied the Inspector. "He weighs relative values. Decides his original hunch was a bad mistake and this is his way of covering up while he backs out. How does it sound to you, Ellery?"

"Admissible, but rather on the involved side, don't you think?" Ellery scowled. "There's an alternate theory which is much simpler. Mr. Jack Ziggy. Mr. Ziggy, too, develops chilled feet. Mr. Ziggy therefore decides to give us a fall guy. Writes the note to Mrs. Van Dome, sends the wire to Leonardo Vince."

"Maybe he even heard a rumor about that raid," cried Nikki, "and purposely went to that bookie place to be picked up before the eight o'clock meeting tonight at Penn Station! With Vince meeting Mrs. Van Dome, and himself arrested on a minor charge —"

"What's wrong with that, dad?"

"Not a thing," snarled his father. "*Two* theories. Why couldn't there be just one?"

"My income tax," moaned Mike. "Ain't anybody interested in my income tax? Look at the time!"

"Oh, there are more than two theories, dad," said Ellery absently. "I can think of at least two others — either of which would satisfy my plot appetite considerably more. The trouble is —" But then Ellery stopped. He was staring at his father's feet.

"What's the matter?" said the Inspector, sighting along his legs. "Hole in my shoe?"

"That brief case you've got your feet on," said Ellery.

"What?"

"That's mine," said Mike. "You remember, Ellery, the one I brought when I came to you."

"We took it from Mike after we got down to the offices," said the Inspector. "Routine. Here, Mike, we're through with it."

"Wait a minute, Mike," said Ellery. "You know, come to think of it,

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I never did examine this brief case while you were at the apartment, and finding Mrs. Carson dead at the office as soon as we got there . . . Dad, may I have that?"

"Sure. But it won't tell you anything."

"Is this the newspaper that the thief stuffed into it?" asked Ellery, drawing out a rather crumpled copy of *The New York Times*.

"Lemme see," said Mike. "Yeah. I remember that tear just over the T."

"You're sure, Mike."

"Sure I'm sure!"

"What are you looking so eagle-eyed about?" sniffed Nikki, peering over Ellery's shoulder. "It's just a copy of yesterday's *New York Times*."

"And there isn't an identifiable fingerprint on it," said the Inspector.

"So now tell us you've made a great big blinding deduction."

Ellery opened his mouth, but something else opened simultaneously — the door to Inspector Queen's anteroom. Sergeant Velie stood there.

"Her Highness," said the Sergeant, "is back from the front — madder'n hell."

"Ah, Mrs. Van Dome!" said Ellery, jumping to his feet. "Come in, come in — you're just in time."

"I imagine, Mike," said Ellery, "that your original plan didn't include the concept of an accomplice at all."

"What's that?" said Mike. "What did you say, Ellery?"

"When you set fire to the reception-room settee, it was in a less involved plot. You would smell smoke, you would come running out of your office raising an outcry, Ziggy and Vince and — yes — Mrs. Carson would dash out of *their* offices to see what was the matter, you would put the fire out yourself, and meanwhile any of the three — yes, including Mrs. Carson — might have been the 'thief' who slipped into your office and stole the Van Dome kleptomania-case records. You would have given us three red herrings instead of two — a more nourishing diet."

"What are you talkin' about, Ellery!"

"But something went wrong. In fact, Mike, the most interesting part of your plot to extort money from Mrs. Van Dome is that it never really got started. Something went wrong at the outset. Since Mrs. Carson is the one you murdered, it takes no great intellect to infer that it was Mrs. Carson who threw the monkey-wrench. What was it, Mike? *Did Mrs. Carson accidentally see you set the fire with your own hands?*"

Mike sat very straight in the honored chair beside the Inspector's desk. But then, all at once, he sagged.

"Yes. She saw you do it, Mike. But you didn't know that till you came back to the office that evening ostensibly to 'see' if you hadn't left your tax records there by mistake. You found Mrs. Carson there alone, you asked her about the tax records . . . and she told you she had seen

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you set the fire. Did she also perceive dimly that you had taken your own property? I think so, Mike. I think Mrs. Carson accused you of sculduggery, and I think it was then and there that you gave up all thought of bleeding Mrs. Van Dome of considerably more than she was paying you to protect her daughter's name. You took out your gun and shot Mrs. Carson to death. Very stupid, Mike. Lost your head. But that's the way it is with honest men who go wrong. You'd have been better off to let Mrs. Carson talk. The worst that would have happened is that you might lose your license — you had still not committed any crime! And even if you had already tried to extort, would Mrs. Van Dome have prosecuted? No, indeed. Your very plot in its origin — setting up a straw man who 'stole' your tax records and so got into the position of being able to blackmail Mrs. Van Dome — was predicated on Mrs. Van Dome's willingness to do anything rather than let the story of her daughter's kleptomania come out.

"All this must have been obvious to you — and still you shot Mrs. Carson. Mike, Mike."

The Inspector was sitting there with his mouth open.

"The rest," said Ellery, scowling, "followed logically. Having killed, you then had to direct attention away from yourself. You'd already made a beginning with the fire. The killing made it look as if Mrs. Carson had been murdered by an 'accomplice.' The 'accomplice' was what you had to work with. And you worked it to death, winding up with a frame of Leonardo Vince — who was supposed to take the rap for you, but — so unpredictable are plots, Mike — who refused to fall into the trap. That was another bad mistake, Mike — picking Mr. Vince. But you made a mistake that was even worse."

The Inspector tried twice to speak, nothing coming out but a bray and a croak. The third time he made it. "But Ellery, this is all speculation! You haven't *deduced* anything. It's guesswork!"

This was the most repulsive word in the Queen lexicon.

"Wrong, dad. There's a clue which, taken at the source, leads on to the logical conclusion. This newspaper." Ellery waved *The New York Times* from Mike's brief case.

Even Mike looked curious at that. Out of the stupor into which he had fallen he roused himself to blink and lick his lips and glance uneasily at the paper.

"Nikki," said Ellery, "what day is today?"

Nikki jumped. "Day? Why, March fifteenth."

"And what is the date on this newspaper?"

"Why, you saw it yourself. And I remarked on it. Yesterday's paper, I said."

"Yesterday's. Then it's *The New York Times* of *March fourteenth*. When did Mike come to consult me?"

"Yesterday morning."

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"The morning of March *fourteenth*. When, according to Mike's story, had the theft of his income-tax records taken place — the fire, the theft, the substitution of a newspaper for the records in his brief case?"

"Why, the evening before that."

"March *thirteenth*. And what did Mike say?" cried Ellery. "That the fire and substitution of newspaper for records had taken place around six p.m. — six p.m. on March thirteenth! How could a *New York Times* dated March *fourteenth* have been put into Mike Magoon's brief case at six p.m. on March *thirteenth*? It couldn't have been. Not possibly. No morning newspaper comes out that early the previous day, not even the tabloids. And certainly not *The New York Times!* Then Mike Magoon lied. The substitution hadn't been made the previous day at all — it had been made on the morning of the fourteenth — just before Mike came to see me . . . obviously by Mike himself. Then Mike's whole story collapses, and all I had to do was re-examine the known facts in the light of Mike's duplicity." Ellery glanced at the clock. "There's still time to send your tax return to Uncle Sam, Mike," he said, "although I'm afraid you'll have to change your address."

FOR MYSTERY LOVERS — The publishers of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE also publish the following paper-covered mystery books at 25¢ each:

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The name Leonard L. Leonard, we found out long after the fact, is a nom de plume — *the middle initial stands for (you've guessed it) "Leonard." The pseudonym was born one day early in 1938 in an office at the Warner Brothers Studio in Hollywood. Two screen writers, Leonard L. Levinson and Leonard Neubauer, decided to collaborate on a radio sketch for Edward Arnold and Nat Pendleton, the well-known motion picture actors. When the radio script was finished, the two authors decided to rewrite it as a short story and try to have the story published first — that is, prior to the intended broadcast. The result, titled "Wages of Innocence," appeared in "Collier's," signed by a triple version of their mutual name. The original radio script was later etherized, as planned, except that neither Edward Arnold nor Nat Pendleton enacted the principal roles.*

That is the creative history of "Wages of Innocence." But there is more to the story than that.

We read the L. L. L. yarn during the war in a back issue of "Collier's" — and we liked it. So we instructed our office staff to locate the author or the author's agent. Contact was made with "Collier's" but apparently the magazine had purchased the story from the authors direct and for some reason (those things happened during the war) all records of the authors' true names and addresses were lost. Our office staff dug in: they got in touch with various Authors' guilds, with multitudinous literary agents, with anyone and everyone who might possibly give us a clue to the identity and whereabouts of L. L. L. At one stage we even considered calling in the Bureau of Missing Persons. All our efforts, however, converged on the same spot — the blank wall at the end of Dead End Street.

Then one morning, shortly after the war, we received a letter. It was from L. L. L. and it suggested to your Editor that he had overlooked a splendid crime story called "Wages of Innocence"! Why not, asked the letter, consider "Wages of Innocence" for reprint in EQMM? Can you beat it! If the Editor couldn't go to the mountain . . .

Eventually, as matters turned out, Mr. Levinson, one of the collaborators, actually visited our office — and a "marriage," with suitable dowry, was arranged . . .

WAGES OF INNOCENCE

by LEONARD L. LEONARD

GOVERNOR HUNNIWELL jacked up his sagging smile and propelled his visitor to the door with a hearty slap on the back. Another minute and it would have been a push, for the governor wanted to go home. A day

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filled to overflowing with re-election plans, on top of the ordinary routine. That night a speech for the Better Government League. The governor wondered if it was worth all the effort.

He reached for his hat and pressed a button, which brought his secretary gliding into the room.

"That will be all, Miss Lovett," he said. "I'm knocking off for the day. You might as well leave, too."

"But what about Joe Kane?" she asked. "He's been waiting all afternoon."

The governor cursed under his breath, but put his hat back on the peg. "Who the devil's Joe Kane?"

"The garage mechanic from Millburg who was just released from the state pen," prompted Miss Lovett. "The one who served five years for an auto theft he didn't commit."

Governor Hunniwell nodded in assent as he connected the name with the case. He remembered the long-distance call from the Jefferson County district attorney, asking him to see Kane personally, to smooth things over and save everyone concerned a lot of trouble. He ran his fingers through the shaggy, silvery mane that gave him such a fine platform appearance, and wondered bitterly how those boneheads managed to pull such a stupid stunt. And now, as usual, he had to do the dirty work.

"I hope they've got the right thief this time," he complained as he smoothed his hair down again. Then he remembered — the real culprit had confessed to the crime just before he died peacefully in bed.

"All right, send this Kane in and I'll give him his pardon," he told the girl. "No need of you staying. Run along."

The door closed behind her and he glanced impatiently at his watch — 6:45. The statehouse was as quiet as the mausoleum after which it had been patterned.

In a moment the door opened slowly and Joe Kane stood tentatively on the threshold. Then he shuffled into the room, his cheap new suit drooping from his scrawny frame.

"You wanted to see me, Governor?" he asked in a hoarse mumble. His eyes traveled along the frames on the wall.

"Of course!" The man behind the desk had assumed his best gubernatorial manner, drawing charm from some last hidden reserve. He rose to shake hands. "Sit down, Mr. Kane. have a cigar."

After both cigars were drawing, Joe leaned back. Hunniwell cleared his throat and began to talk.

"Mr. Kane," the governor said, and he might have been laying a cornerstone, "a terrible injustice has been done you. You have been accused of a crime you did not commit. And for that crime you were found guilty and punished in our state penitentiary for the past five years. Five years out of your life which no one can return to you."

The little man had been following the governor's words with grave attention. Now he interrupted: "It wasn't exactly five years that I served.

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Just four years, eleven months and thirteen days. I kept track. This Sellers — the other guy — confessed eighteen days before my stretch was up."

The governor looked sharply at Kane, but the latter was serious. After a moment, Hunniwell went on.

"Fate dealt you a cruel blow, Mr. Kane," he said. "But I want you to know that this great state stands ready to restore to you everything you have lost. I have here . . ."

Pawing through the untidy piles of paper strewn over his desk, he finally found it.

". . . I have here your full and unconditional pardon. As governor of this state I hereby restore your citizenship, your right to vote and, most important of all" — he paused for added impressiveness — "your good name!"

Kane took the outstretched paper, hurriedly read a few lines, then asked: "Does this mean it's just like I never was in prison at all?"

"Yes — as if you were never in prison at all." Hunniwell beamed indulgently.

"Gee! That's swell. . . . Only —"

"Of course, I realize that there are things this pardon cannot restore to you. Things that all the money in the world could not restore to you."

Joe considered this. "That's right, Governor," he said soberly.

"But, after all, the mills of the gods grind slowly — but exceedingly fine. Think of the thousands of cases which must be weighed and judged each year. After all, there can't help but be a mistake once in a while."

From behind a screen of smoke, the victim of circumstance nodded agreeably.

"I certainly was lucky," he admitted, after the governor had hailed the eventual triumph of justice in his case.

The governor eyed his visitor suspiciously for any hint of sarcasm. "I hope this experience isn't going to make you bitter, Kane."

"Oh, no!" Joe protested. He hesitated before he spoke again. "The only thing is — I feel I should've got some time off for good behavior."

Hunniwell looked at the confidential report that had been delivered along with the pardon. Then he understood why the parole board kept passing over Joe.

"Your prison record wasn't of the best, you know," he said in gentle reproof.

"Maybe not, Governor," Joe admitted. "You see, I never had the right incentive to act good in there. I hadn't done anything wrong in the first place."

Governor Hunniwell began to feel uncomfortable. "Tell you what I'll do, Kane," he said briskly. "This state has given you a raw deal and I feel that you've got something coming to you. I'm going to have one of my friends in the legislature introduce a bill giving you some recompense for the years you've been in prison."

Joe beamed. "That's fine. When do I get the money?"

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Hunniwell pursed his brows and rocked back and forth in his chair. He patiently explained that the legislature wouldn't meet again this year. Next year they'd take the matter up. Of course, it would be a little time before they got around to Joe's case. In about two years, he judged, Joe would get his money.

"Two years!" Joe's face clouded. "How much will I get then?"

The answer was as reassuring and as evasive as a campaign promise. The governor said he would do his best. It all depended on the election. If he was returned to office, and he felt very confident, he promised to push through a nice little nest egg for Joe.

And that reminded Hunniwell of a point. "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't talk too much about this little — incident. I'm right in the middle of my campaign now, and one of the opposition newspapers is investigating penal conditions. Not that they'll find anything, but take your case, for instance. They might twist it around somehow to damage my reputation."

Hastily Joe assured the governor that he didn't want to cause any trouble.

"That's fine, my boy," the governor boomed and once more reached for his hat.

"But don't you think two years is a long time to wait for that dough from the legislature?" Joe asked. "After all, it's gonna be sorta tough to find a job."

"Well, I might be able to find you a position . . . say in the highway department," the governor said.

Joe shook his head doubtfully.

"A nice job, out in the open air, working on our new highways," impatiently urged the governor. "After all, you shouldn't be choosy."

"But I just came off the road gang," Joe explained. "I can't see no future there."

Mentally the governor checked over the other departments where he might place Joe. Every job at his command was occupied by a "Re-elect Hunniwell" worker.

"Joe, I can't figure out another thing that's open right now. Mind you, it isn't the governor's responsibility, but I'd be glad to help you. If you can think of anything I can do — anything within reason, of course, why . . ."

"Yes, there is one thing, Governor." Joe said. "I've had lots of time to figger this out and I feel that this here state only owes me one thing."

"What's that?"

"A robbery," Joe answered. He might have been asking for a match.

Governor Hunniwell's face twisted into an amazed question mark. "A what?" he asked.

"A robbery," the little man repeated patiently. "I paid the legal price for one, didn't I? Well, I never committed no robbery and now I've got one due me. All you gotta do is look the other way while I take what's coming to me."

The governor reached for a chair and sank back. "But . . . me look

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the other way . . . suppose you're caught?" he asked.

"Then I'll go back and serve the other eighteen days."

"The other eighteen days . . ." Hunniwell repeated mechanically. Suddenly the full import of Joe's request sank in. "Why, the idea's insane! Man, do you realize that you're asking the chief executive of this state to compound a felony?"

Joe shook his head firmly. "Oh, no! I'm only asking you for justice. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a robbery for a robbery that's already been paid for."

The governor's pontifical manner began to crumble. Clinging desperately to logic, he tried to argue with Joe. "But it's impossible. It's too . . . too fantastic. Suppose you shot someone in this robbery — or took their life savings. Then an innocent party would suffer — just like you did."

"I've got that all figgered out, too," he reassured Hunniwell. "I won't have to hurt no innocent party."

"Nevertheless, I couldn't give my permission to any such lawbreaking scheme." Flustered and annoyed, the governor got up and strode to the door. But Joe was one stride ahead, blocking his exit.

"I guess you don't understand," he said. "I'm not asking your permission. All I want you to do is — stick up your hands!"

Incredulously, the governor stopped, then tried to push past, until Joe pulled out an ancient revolver and poked it in his belly. Hunniwell backed away feebly.

"But . . . but you can't do this to me," he said.

Kane clucked sympathetically. "Mister, that's exactly the way I felt when they sent me up five years ago. But keep them hands up! I don't want to see no innocent party hurt."

"All right, only don't point that gun at me," the governor muttered. "Here. Here's my wallet."

Warily Joe took it in his left hand, plucked out the paper money and let the wallet drop to the floor. Thumbing through the bills didn't take long and he turned back in disgust.

"Twelve lousy bucks! For five years. The state owes me more than that!" Using his gun as a prod, he pushed the governor around until he faced the wall and then began searching him.

The back of Hunniwell's neck turned brick red. "You'll pay for this, young man," he yelled.

A jab from the gun made him lower his tone, but he continued in a whisper: "You'll get twenty years — and this time it won't be any mistake. In ten minutes the state police will be after you. I'll call them all out. And if they don't get you, I'll call out the national guard."

He stopped when he heard Joe's awed whistle. From the governor's coat pocket he had pulled a bulging packet of bills, fresh from the bank and speckled with zeros.

"What a roll! Why, I bet there's twenty grand here."

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"There's twenty-five thousand dollars there." The governor's voice was choked with rage. "And it doesn't belong to me, so you better give it right back or . . . or you'll get into trouble. . . ."

"Who does it belong to?" Joe inquired.

Governor Hunniwell hesitated. "It's a campaign contribution," he finally said.

Joe riffled the money with his thumb. Then he began distributing it carefully about his person.

"Your job pays ten grand a year," he said as he worked. "Somebody must be awful anxious for you to keep it, to spend twenty-five thousand bucks on your campaign. Too bad they didn't give you a check . . . must have wanted to keep it confidential, huh?"

The governor pulled the last shreds of his dignity about him. "What my friends do is none of your business!"

Joe patted the governor's back. "You can depend on me. I won't say a word about it to a soul," he said and shuffled to the door. He ordered the governor to stay where he was for a good five minutes, spiking the command with a warning. Then just before he closed the door, Joe Kane relaxed.

"Thanks for taking such an interest in my case, Governor," he called out.

For the next forty seconds the silence of the statehouse was broken only by Governor Hunniwell's heavy breathing. Then, after a cautious glance at the door, he tiptoed to the telephone and grabbed it clumsily.

"Hello, operator," he whispered huskily, "Give me Pete, on the front door. Hurry now, I've just been — Hello, Pete? This is the governor. A man just held me up. Yes! Just left my office. Has he gone through yet? No one? Good. Stop him at all costs. Stop everybody. Did he get much? I'll say he did."

The governor's voice trailed off. Twenty-five thousand dollars. Pete and Kane shooting it out on the front steps of the statehouse. Headlines in the papers. And the opposition papers. . . . Try to explain how he could be robbed of twenty-five thousand dollars, with the election just two weeks away.

Pete's voice came calling anxiously from the receiver. Hunniwell answered him. "Never mind, Pete. I guess he slipped out the side entrance. No, don't try to stop him. I'll explain later. Just forget —"

The door was opening. Governor Hunniwell slowly put the telephone in its cradle. Joe Kane was standing on the threshold with an apologetic smile.

"Sorry to bother you again," Joe said. "I forgot something."

He shuffled over to the desk, found what he wanted and started to leave

"You . . . you . . . what did you take this time?" gibbered the governor.

"My pardon," Joe said, and closed the door behind him.

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Thumbnail portrait of a steady, though infrequent, contributor to EQMM — can you guess who? Feature writer for a newspaper; copy-writer for theatre programs; reporter; public stenographer; editor; claim adjuster for an insurance company; correspondent for the Federated Press; poet; biographer; novelist. Out of that varied vocational background has come some of the finest detective-crime short stories now being written by an American. Do you know her identity? Yes, it's a woman — a woman who says about herself that she is short and doesn't weigh much, flatters herself that she doesn't look her age, certainly doesn't feel it, and is afraid she doesn't always act it!

The answer is — Miriam Allen deFord, author of such classic tales as "Mortmain," "Something To Do with Figures," and "Farewell to the Faulkners," all original stories written especially for EQMM.

Let's dig even deeper into the personality behind Miriam Allen deFord — the more we know about a writer, the more understanding we can bring to that writer's work, and the easier we can recognize the priceless ingredient that individualizes every truly talented craftsman. It is interesting to know about Miss deFord that in her youth her three favorite poets were Shelley, Poe, and Heine; later A. E. Housman and Emily Dickinson "had most to say" to her. But note that all five of her poetic affinities have certain great qualities in common — an inordinate sense of beauty, a delicately attuned sensitivity to life and to the words that express living, and above all, a wondrous imagination. In the field of prose Miss deFord cherishes most WUTHERING HEIGHTS *and* KRISTIN LAVRANSDATTER *— very revealing preferences again. And the proof that these literary influences did not find Miss deFord's own imagination unresponsive is clearly a matter of record: she has had two of her short stories included in O. Henry Memorial annuals.*

So now you know something about the person who conceived and wrote the short story we now offer you — "Left-Handed Murder." We have taken our own long way of getting to the point, which is that "Left-Handed Murder" is not (to borrow a phrase from Christopher Morley) a "run-of-the-guillotine crime tale" . . .

LEFT-HANDED MURDER

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

BRING the Wells woman in again and I'll prove my point," said Halloran.

"What's the use?" Schmidt protested. "We can't get her to talk, no matter what we do to her. All she does is snivel."

"That's it exactly. You've scared

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the daylights out of her, yelling and flashing the light in her eyes and pushing her around. That's old stuff, Schmidt. Didn't you learn anything at that Police Institute last year? Besides, these people aren't bums. Wells was general manager of a big company, they lived in a nice apartment. You can't get anything out of a dame like that by your methods. Get her in, let me talk to her nice, and I'll bet we'll find our something."

"O.K., you're the boss," Schmidt said reluctantly. "But I hate these cheating dames that run around with other guys."

"We don't know for sure she was one of them, do we? That's only one theory of how the thing happened."

"It's the only possible theory," Schmidt growled. But he pressed the buzzer and ordered the matron to bring Mrs. Wells back again from her cell.

She was a little dark woman, who probably had been pretty but who now was too thin and too frightened. Her eyes were big in her white face, and her fists were clenched to give herself courage. She was still in dressing-gown and slippers, the way they had shoved her in the wagon at midnight, seven hours before.

To keep himself from objecting, Schmidt stood up and looked out of the window.

"Sit down, Mrs. Wells," Halloran said, looking like somebody's father with his white hair and his broad good-natured face. "There are a few things I want to ask you."

"I've told you everything I could, officer." Her voice was hoarse and she had been crying. "Please, won't you let me go home? I didn't do it, I swear I didn't. And I want to get dressed — I'm ashamed, going around like this."

"We can't let you go; you must realize that, Mrs. Wells." Halloran's voice was kind, even respectful. "You're a material witness, if nothing more — the only one. But I'll have your clothes sent for, and any toilet things you want. Just tell the matron. But first, I want you to tell me again just what happened."

"But I did — last night — when that gentleman there —" she gestured toward the window — "told me to."

"You were too upset then. Now I want to get the story all in a piece."

"It was — I was standing in front of the bureau, fixing my hair for the night —"

"Start before that. Which of you went to bed first?"

"He did — Robert. I was washing out some stockings, in the kitchen. When I came in the bedroom he was in bed already. But he wasn't asleep — he hadn't even thrown his pillow on the floor yet."

"Thrown his pillow?"

She almost smiled.

"I know it sounds silly, doesn't it? But we both did that, every night. Neither of us could bear to sleep with a pillow, but the bed looks funny in the daytime if it's make up without them. So when we got settled for the night, we'd always throw our pillows

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on the floor, one on each side. It's — it was almost the only thing we had in common, I guess." Her voice started to tremble. Halloran ignored it.

"So then what, after you came into the room?"

"Why — nothing. I just undressed, and went to the bathroom to brush my teeth, and then I came back and started to braid my hair before the mirror."

"Did your husband say anything?"

"Not till — not till just before it — it happened. He was cross with me, because dinner had been late. I couldn't get waited on in the store, and dinner wasn't ready when he came home. He hadn't spoken to me all evening, just sat and read. He's — he was always very particular about everything being on time."

"I see. But he did speak to you finally?"

"Yes. He was still angry, I could tell by his voice. I never dared say anything first when he was angry like that. He said — shall I repeat exactly what he said?"

"Please."

Schmidt turned around at the word and snorted. Then he resumed his morose stare out of the window.

"He said, 'You damned slowpoke, aren't you ever going to put that light out and give me a chance to sleep?' "

"And what did you answer?"

"I was nervous. I said, 'Just another minute, Robert, please — I'll be ready right away.' So he growled something I couldn't catch, and sat up and grabbed his pillow and threw it hard on the floor, and sort of banged down hard on the bed again. I saw him in the mirror. And then —"

Her voice stopped, and her face grew whiter still, if that were possible.

"And then?" Halloran prompted her gently.

"He — he made a funny sound — sort of half a whimper and half a bellow. And I turned and said, 'What's the matter, Robert? Is anything wrong?' I thought for a second it was just — just that he was so mad at me. Then I noticed the queer way he was lying — such a contorted, stiff kind of way. And I ran around to his side of the bed — he lay on the left side, and the bureau is between the windows, to the right of the bed as you face it, between the windows — and right away I saw —"

Her teeth were chattering, and she shuddered violently. She went on with an effort.

"I saw the blood, and the way his face looked. I didn't know what to do — I was terrified. Before I realized what I was doing I was out of the apartment and down the hall. My feet just seemed to carry me. The people down the hall had a phone — we hadn't been able to get one. So I woke them, and they phoned the police, and the lady came back with me and we sat together in the living room until you — until somebody from here came."

Schmidt could contain himself no longer.

"The police?" he said angrily.

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"Why the police? Why didn't you phone for a doctor — unless you knew the guy was dead because you'd killed him or had him killed?"

"Oh, no, no!" Mrs. Wells sobbed. "If you'd seen his face — the way it looked — you'd have know he was dead! And the blood — I thought it was an accident. Or maybe he had had a hemorrhage. I didn't know what had happened. I just lost my head, I guess. I've always taken it for granted that when something bad happens you ask the police to come and help you," she concluded with a pathetic sort of dignity. Halloran bit his lip at the sight of Schmidt's expression.

"That's quite understandable," he said hastily. "Tell me, Mrs. Wells, was that where you husband always slept — I mean, on the left side of the bed?"

"Oh, yes, because of his eye."

Halloran lifted his eyebrows.

"His left eye, you know — it was glass. He lost it in a fight when he was a boy. He always took it out when he went to bed, and then it was more comfortable, I guess, to lie on that side. Besides, he started doing that when we were first married — he didn't like me to see him when he was out. Afterwards he didn't care, but it was a habit by then."

Schmidt turned around again.

"Look, lady," he exploded, "you're not fooling us, not one bit. We know what happened. We know the only way that guy could be stabbed in the left temple while he lay in bed was for somebody to be hidden under the bed and reach up and do it — unless you did the job yourself and are lying about the whole business. This thing about his eye makes it absolutely sure; he couldn't see if somebody reached up from under him with a knife. But *you* could see, if you were looking in the mirror. You did see, I'll bet my bottom dollar on that. You knew all about it — you planted the murderer there. Your boy friend, wasn't it? You and him concocted this thing together, to get rid of the old man — and then you pulled this phony business of running down the hall to phone, and left the door open so he and his knife could get out before the police got there. But you won't get away with it. Come on, now, who is he? We'll find out anyway, don't think we won't. But you give us his name now and save us the trouble, if you know what's good for you."

"Cut it, Schmidt," said Halloran disgustedly. Josephine Wells had collapsed, sobbing and shaking in her chair. "I want Tim! I want my brother!" she wailed.

"Your brother, eh?" Schmidt shouted. "So there's a brother, is there? I take it back — it was you and him, not you and the boy friend, cooked up this scheme to finish off the old man and get hold of his money. A man old enough to be your daddy — what'd you marry him for in the first place, except his money? And when you waited seventeen years and still he didn't die, and he was tight with his dough and mean to you besides, then you and this

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brother of yours —"

That roused her.

"That's not true!" she shrieked. "It's not true! You can't implicate my brother in this!" She laughed on a high hysterical note. "He's got an alibi — a wonderful alibi. Right now he's in the separation center at Fort Dix, waiting to be discharged from the army." She began to sob again. "Oh, Tim, Tim! I want Tim!"

Halloran stood up, trying to keep the anger out of his voice.

"It's no use," he said. "We won't get anything more out of her now. Ring for them to take her back to the cell."

The next day she felt better. She had her clothes, had been able to fix her hair and her face and look presentable, and she had the telegram from Tim. They hadn't let her wire or phone him, but he must have seen it in the papers. She could imagine the newspaper stories — a man of Robert's position: she didn't want to see them. But Tim had, and she had his telegram. "Hold everything Sis I'm coming." That helped to quiet the fluttering panic in her brain, to enable her to realize what had happened and to put her thoughts in coherent order so as to make other people understand.

The thing to do was to do nothing, to leave it at what had actually happened — standing at her mirror, hearing that sound, running to look at Robert, running out to phone. They would have to acquit her because there was nothing by which to convict her. And when it was all over, she would sell everything and get away from there fast. Perhaps she and Tim could live together, now that he was out of the army. "Boy friend," indeed! When had she ever had a chance to acquire a boy friend, married at nineteen to a man twice her age, marrying him because Mother and Dad had died, and Tim was only twelve and had to be taken care of, and Robert was Dad's boss and wanted her enough to take on the burden of Tim too? She had heard often enough of his superhuman generosity and sacrifice, in all those years when she had been the frightened slave of a harsh, brutal master. Even after Robert had grown to hate her because he could not make her love him, even after her own timid gratitude had turned to loathing, there had been no hope of escape. He would not divorce her because it would have been public acknowledgement of failure, and Robert Wells never failed in anything he undertook. She could not divorce him because she had no money, would get none from him, had no training or experience or self-confidence to make her own way in the world. There was no way out except the certain escape of death for one or the other of them. But she did not need to pretend now, to herself or anyone else, that she was sorry he was dead. Even in dying he had managed to make things hard for her.

It was a week before Tim was free of the army and could get to her. The first visit, she had been too upset to

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talk. They had just clung together, under the guard's eyes, and she had sobbed her heart out on his khaki shoulder. Now he had come again, with the lawyer he had hired with his discharge money, and they were letting them talk in private, with the guard watching but too far away to hear.

"I want you first of all to tell me everything that happened, Mrs. Wells," Wadsworth, the lawyer, said. Tim — nice, solid Technical Sergeant Timothy Burr, who would soon be a promising young engineer again — squeezed her hand encouragingly.

"Robert went to bed first," she began again wearily. She had told the story so many times now!

"No, begin before that. Tell me exactly what you did all that day."

"What's the point of that?" Tim wanted to know.

"There may not be any. But it will give me a picture, and perhaps something your sister won't think important might give me a clue. It's all pretty vague in my mind so far."

"Well," Josephine said, "I got up first; I always do — did. I started breakfast and came back and dressed, and when the coffee began to perk I woke Robert so he could take his shower and the eggs and toast would be ready on the dot when he got through. I called him to breakfast but he wasn't ready — I don't know why he was so slow that morning. Usually he had everything timed to the minute, and heaven help me if I didn't too. He was fussing around something in the bedroom, and I started to go in — the kitchen's off the living room — to see what was keeping him, and he yelled at me, 'For God's sake mind your own business and let me mind mine. Pour out my coffee and I'll be there.' He came in right after that, and I saw he was mad at me — so mad his hand shook when he lifted his cup and he spilled some of his coffee. I didn't know what I'd done now, but I'd learned to say nothing when he got those spells. He finished breakfast and got his hat and coat and slammed the door without even saying goodbye."

"Was that unusual?" asked Wadsworth.

"Oh, no," she answered dully, "it happened about half the time. So then — you want me to tell you everything I did, all day? There really wasn't a thing worth telling."

"Go ahead."

"Well, I washed the breakfast dishes, and I had to wash out the table cloth too, because Robert had spilled coffee on it. He was always complaining about putting too much in the laundry, and it was just a little table cloth. Then I vacuumed the whole apartment, and dusted the living room, and — I don't know. Oh, yes, I made out my grocery list for the afternoon — I had to go to four different places because so many things I wanted were out of stock, that's what made dinner late and got Robert mad again — and I watered my plants in the bay window and cleaned the canary's cage and filled

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its seed and water dishes. Then I defrosted the refrigerator, and then it was time for lunch, and I made myself a cup of tea and ate a tomato and a roll. I didn't want any more, because we couldn't get any butter.

"Then I remembered it was Tuesday, which is the day I do the bedroom — really give it a going-over. I had vacuumed already, but I changed the bureau scarf and dusted everything and turned the mattress and changed the sheets and pillow cases. That sounds funny for Tuesday, but our laundryman came on Wednesdays. Then I saw I had an hour to spare before I needed to go shopping for dinner, so I darned some socks of Robert's and mended a slip I had torn, and then I got my shopping bag and went out. I told you about being late, and dinner not being ready when Robert got there at six-thirty. He yelled at me some more and then he stopped talking altogether and just ate his dinner and went into the living room and tuned in a news broadcast on the radio and then settled down with his pipe and a book he was reading. I washed the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen, and by then it was eight o'clock. I wanted to hear a musical program but when I turned on the radio he snapped at me to shut it off, so I did and just sat down and read the evening paper he'd brought and then worked on a sweater I'm knitting. Neither of us said anything. About eleven or eleven fifteen he finished the book, and threw it on the table and stretched and yawned. Then he went into the bedroom without a word to me, but I knew he expected me to come right away so he could have the lights out and go to sleep. I started to follow, and then I remembered I had some stockings to wash out, and I wanted them to be dry by morning, so I got them and went out in the kitchen to wash them and hang them up. Then I went back to the bedroom and undressed and started to fix my hair. You know all the rest of it."

"Beautiful domestic evening," said Tim sourly. "You know, Sis. I blame myself a lot for this whole mess."

"You, Tim!" She was startled. "You had nothing to do with it. You were in Fort Dix."

"You know darned well what I mean. I realized years ago why you married Robert, only too well. If it hadn't been for me —"

"You hush. I'd have done it a hundred times."

"I know you would," he said fondly, "and that's why it makes me feel so bad. You've sacrificed your whole life. What have you ever had of love, or real marriage, or any happiness at all? Well, when we've got you out of this thing, I'm going to see that you find out what life can be like. You're young yet —"

"I'm old; I'm thirty-six. And Mr. Wadsworth doesn't want to talk about that."

"Well, anyway, you'll see. Excuse me, Mr. Wadsworth."

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"I'll be frank with you," he said. "This whole case just seems to be a

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dead-end alley. The thing's impossible, and yet it happened. I am morally sure you have nothing to do with it, Mrs. Wells —"

"She hasn't," scowled Tim. "If you think she has, you'd better —"

"Let me finish, Sergeant Burr — no, I ought to say Mr. Burr now, oughtn't I? I don't take cases, if I can help it, where I think my client is guilty. But you'll have to acknowledge this is a thoroughly screwy case. Here a man merely goes to bed, turns over on his side, and is stabbed through the temple. It doesn't make sense. Nobody finds any weapon, nobody knows how or why it was done, they grab you merely because you were the only one there — I don't know if they even believe their crazy theory that somebody was lurking under the bed and reached up and stabbed him. Maybe they believe it because there isn't anything else to believe. I hear they're hunting now for somebody you knew who was left-handed, Mrs. Wells, because only a left-handed man could have lain in that position and reached up with a knife and used it on your husband's left side."

"Well, who is he and where is he, and how did he get there, that's what I'd like to know?" Tim burst out. "Anybody that knows you and knows the kind of life you led would see how crazy that is. I can't imagine you, Jo, carefully picking out a left-handed accomplice and planting him under the bed — when? It would have to have been before Robert got home that evening, and the guy would have had a nice long wait under there — and then he and his bloody knife — excuse me, Sis, I oughtn't to say such things in front of you, but it's all so darned foolish — he runs out of the house like that, at midnight, and disappears into thin air.

"Now if you had really wanted to eliminate the guy — and I wouldn't have blamed you, only you haven't got it in you to do it — you wouldn't have needed to call in anybody to help you. You could have done it yourself, after he was asleep —"

"What with?" asked Josephine mildly. "The carving knife? After seventeen years? Don't be idiotic, Tim."

"That's what I mean. If it had been me, now, I learned how to sneak up on an enemy and dispose of him quietly. But you! Why, good Lord, when I sent you that box of souvenirs from France, I didn't dare put anything in it that even resembled a weapon, for fear it would scare you stiff. You, why you wouldn't even stick a pin into a guy, let alone a knife. Say — wait a minute!"

"What is it, Mr. Burr?"

"Look here, Mr. Wadsworth. I've got an idea. Sis, tell us again exactly what happened after he growled at you to turn the light out and come to bed?"

"I told you. He threw his pillow on the floor, and then sort of banged himself down on the bed, as near the edge as he could get, the way he always did when — when he wanted me

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to understand he was angry at me and just wanted to go to sleep — I mean —"

She flushed scarlet, and suddenly she was an embarrassed, pretty woman instead of a frightened ghost.

"We understand, Mrs. Wells. So he threw himself down on the mattress, and —"

"And then it happened. He made that horrible, queer noise, and I ran around and —"

"Sis!" Tim was staring at her, his voice rough. "Whatever became of that net-maker's thing from Brittany that was in the box of stuff I sent you?"

"Net-maker's thing?" she said, bewildered.

"I don't know what you call it. Some old fisherman gave it to me for a few cigarettes, because he hadn't anything else to offer me and was too proud to take a gift. I stuck it in with the other things I had collected. It was steel, something like a needle, I guess you'd call it, about six inches long, with a big eye, sort of, in the middle and a sharp point at both ends."

She looked at him, her face very white again.

"I — I don't know, Tim," she said. "I can't remember — there was so much stuff —"

"Mr. Wadsworth," he turned to the lawyer urgently. "Do you remember — when Sis was telling you what she did all day, she mentioned that she *turned the mattress?*"

"Yes, but — Oh, I see." The lawyer too turned a shade paler. "You mean, you think he — Mr. Wells ran that thing through the mattress — deliberately —"

"On *her* side. That's why he was so long in the bedroom in the morning. It would take a strong man to push that heavy thing right through the mattress. And that's why he wanted her to put out the light and hurry to bed. Neither of them slept with a pillow — I remember that from the days when I lived with them, when I was a kid. So she'd throw her pillow out and then lie down — unsuspectingly — and in the dark she couldn't see the point sticking out — it's a great big thing, Mr. Wadsworth, with a vicious point at both ends —"

"Oh, Tim!" Josephine cried faintly.

"I see," said the lawyer again. "But if she turned the mattress, then the point — the bottom point instead of the top, since the needle or whatever you call it would be a little longer than the mattress was thick — would be sticking up on his side instead. And that was his blind side, and of course he had no idea she'd turned the mattress around.

"So he — how did you put it, Mrs. Wells? — he banged down in a rage, right on the steel point. And the impact pushed it down a bit, so the point didn't show above the mattress, and with all the blood from the piercing of the temporal artery, which is so near the surface, the police wouldn't notice it."

"He meant *her* to die that way!" Tim whispered. "Oh, my poor Jo!"

"He hated me, Tim. I've known

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that for a long time."

"I can see the whole thing now. He must have had it all planned. When it had happened, he would have taken the needle away and got rid of it. He had the whole night to work in. He could have cleaned things up — there wouldn't have been much hemorrhage if he got there right away to stanch the blood, instead of the way you ran out to phone and left him lying there. And in the morning he could say he woke and found you dead —"

"I've been going to a doctor lately," she said with stiff lips. "My heart. Though the doctor couldn't find anything functionally wrong, and talked about nervous strain — which it was, I knew, but I couldn't do anything about that."

"So it would have been easy to get a certificate saying you had died of an obscure cardiac lesion. And then pure accident — fate — something — dealt him the death he'd planned for you! Mr. Wadsworth, what state is Jo's apartment in now? I mean, is everything just the way she left it?"

"The police have it sealed, till after the inquest." The lawyer stood up. "Come on, young man. We'll get an officer to go with us. And if that devilish thing is still there —

"Keep up your courage, Mrs. Wells. This case is never even coming to trial."

"There's just one thing I can't figure out, Sis," Tim said. The nightmare was all over, and they were together in a secluded booth in the quietest restaurant in the city. They had even found an apartment, and the next day they would move in from the hotel, and life would begin again for both of them.

"What is it, Tim?" Josephine looked ten years younger. Tim had a shrewd idea he wouldn't keep her with him long: which suited him, for there was a girl who had been waiting for him.

"I know you must hate ever to talk or think about it again. But tell me this one thing that's puzzled me, and then we'll mention it as little as possible for the rest of our lives.

"You're not slow or absent-minded, Jo. You notice things. Why, when you turned that mattress, didn't you see the point of that thing sticking out right where your head was supposed to be that night?"

Josephine played with a fork for a long minute. Then she raised her eyes and looked straight into Tim's.

"I did," she said softly.

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Author's Solution to

THE CLUE OF THE TATTOOED MAN

by CLAYTON RAWSON

"Since I myself saw Tinto at the Hotel Astor at the time of the murder," Merlini explained, "it's obvious that the tattooed man seen by the crap players was a phony. In other words, someone was *impersonating* Tinto — imitating his facial peculiarities the same way Jimmy O'Reilly imitates a Hindu — with greasepaint.

"Who? Well, Brady described Tinto as '*tall and underfed*' and that eliminates the fat little magician, the midget, and the hefty nine-foot giant. It leaves only the '*tall, skinny*' Professor Vox.

"The motive — his discovery that Tinto was dating his wife — is also obvious.

"There's another way of pinning the guilt on Professor Vox. Since the crap players swore that the tattooed man was '*the only guy*' to go into and out of the murder room before the cops arrived, how come Vox knew his wife was dead? Answer: only if *he* were the counterfeit tattooed man — therefore, only if *he* were the murderer."

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers: *Because of your overwhelming response to EQMM's first monthly prize contest, we have decided, as a token of our deep appreciation, to add 50 extra prizes — making 81 awards instead of the 31 originally promised. The 50 extra prizes will also be added to the second and third monthly contests. We want to thank all contestants from the bottom of our heart for their submissions and their letters; some of the comments and suggestions in your letters will prove of great value to EQMM and its editorial policy. We wish too that we could write to each and every one of you, but this would be impossible: there is not enough time and energy in one Editor's lifetime to reply personally to so many thousands of well-wishers. We feel certain you will all understand that our first duty, our foremost obligation, is to carry on that wonderful tradition — the show must go on.*

Sincerely,

— ELLERY QUEEN

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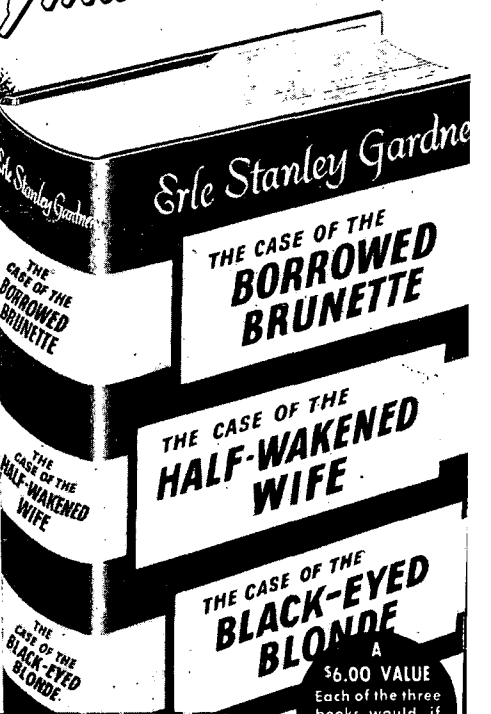
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